



UNIVERSITY OF
GOTHENBURG

AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS IN SWEDEN - HOW DO THEY MAKE SENSE OF
THEIR EMPLOYABILITY?

Master Thesis in Strategic HRM and Labor relations.

30 higher education credits

Author: Akuaka Meshiack Uche

Supervisor: Bertil Rolandsson

Semester: Spring 2014

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I will like to acknowledge and thank several people without whom this research would not have been possible. Firstly, I wish to thank the almighty God for guiding me throughout this study process. Special thanks to my research supervisor Bertil Rolandsson for his tremendous support and guidance throughout the writing process of this thesis. His patience, understanding, suggestions and numerous feedbacks during this tasking process cannot be over-emphasized.

I will like to thank all my course mates especially my opponents who reviewed and opposed my work for their meaningful suggestions proffered during the study process. I will also like to extend my gratitude to all of my teachers both from the Sociology and Work Science department and the Business school. for their immense contribution towards my successful completion of the program “Strategic Human Resource Management and Labor Relations”. I will specifically thank Ola Bergstrom for his relentless effort during the preparation stage of the research.

And last but not the least, I wish to acknowledge the group of people from the African immigrant’s community in Gothenburg who trusted me with their personal stories.

ABSTRACT

Title: African Immigrants in Sweden - How do they make sense of their employability?

Introduction: This research captures the perspectives of a group of African immigrant's in the blue-collar sector of the Swedish labour market, regarding how they make sense of their employability.

Objectives: The objective of this study is to unravel how the respondents anticipated, experienced and adjusted to the realities of the dynamic Swedish labour market, by uncovering how they negotiate their ways (considering the numerous barriers and difficulties they encounter) at different situations and junctures in order to access the labour market.

Methods: The study is conducted using qualitative research approach, from stories of individuals obtained through in-depth interviews.

Theories: This study uses the sensemaking concept to unravel how the individuals in the study make sense of their experiences in the blue-collar sector of the Swedish labour market

Findings: Findings reveal that the group of African immigrants in this study makes sense of their employability through belief and action. The respondents' belief in the stories of abundance of job opportunities and social support, gave rise to lofty expectations that resulted in goal setting (the making of self-fulfilling prophesies), which required various actions in order to fulfil their goals of surviving and adjusting to their new environment.

Keywords: *Sensemaking, employability, human capital, blue-collar employees, African immigrants, Swedish labour market, expectation, reality, adjustment.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

EMPLOYABILITY, SWEDEN AND AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS

This research captures the perspectives of a group of African immigrant's in the blue-collar sector of the Swedish labour market, regarding how they make sense of their employability, by uncovering how they negotiate their ways in the labour market (considering the numerous barriers and difficulties they encounter) at different situations and junctures.

This thesis is structured as follows: This section will present the reader with an insight into the concept of employability, brief account of Sweden and the situation of the African immigrants in the Swedish labour market. It will also mention the problem statement, purpose of the study and the research question. The next section elaborates the previous research and theory. The following section will feature the methodology which details the research process. The fourth section details the data presentation and analysis. Finally the findings will be discussed with reflection on the implications for theory and reviewed literatures, then followed by the conclusions and potentialities for future research.

1.1 EMPLOYABILITY

The concept of employability has received much research attention in recent times either as a social policy issue in Europe or a case of human resources development and adaptability in the United States of America (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005; Fugate and Ashforth, 2003). This attention is buoyed by the change in emphasis from life-time employment to life-long employability as a result of the need for flexibility by organizations, given the constant change in the dynamics of the labour market as well as high rate of employee mobility (Thijssen, Van der Heijden and Rocco, 2008). Employability has thus being described as the ability of individuals to meet the internal and external demands of the labor market (Thijssen, Van Der Heijden and

Rocco, 2008). In the human resource parlance, employability involves the marketability of an individual's skills (Berntson, Sverke and Marklund, 2006). Due to changes in demands of the labour market, predicting the needs of the labour market has become difficult, and only flexible employees that meet key and current requirements are likely to survive in the labour market.

Before now, the issue of unemployment used to be treated as a public burden which the governments alone need to carry (Garsten, et al, 2004). But in recent times that notion has given way to the concept of 'employability' which entails sharing the burden among all the labour market actors – the government, employers and employees (Garsten, et al, 2004). Hence, employability in today's competitive job market is not just dependent on institutional and internal organizational policies alone, but also highly dependent on an individual's efforts, constant update of existing knowledge and skills, as well as the acquisition of new skills (Thijssen, Van der Heijden and Rocco, 2008).

1.2. SWEDEN AND AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE LABOUR MARKET

Sweden currently has above average (percentage to population) share of new arrivals in the European Union, due mainly to the number of people moving on humanitarian grounds in recent times (Kvist, 2012). These arrivals constitute a large percentage of foreign-born in the Swedish population estimated at 14.3% as at 2009/2010 (Kvist, 2012). Most of these immigrants arrive for different purposes such as in search of job opportunities, education and safety, as well as for marriage or reunion with family members. Among these immigrants, considerable share includes those from the African continent who move to Sweden for the various reasons mentioned above. It is worthwhile noting that this increase in new arrivals has been shown to weigh so much on the job market, leading to rise in unemployment that is noticeable among immigrants (Kvist, 2012).

The ability of African immigrants' working in the blue collar sector of the Swedish labour market, to make sense of their employability is affected by a number of factors, among them is their reliance on available information, which always shows the overall outlook for job opportunities in Sweden at a very positive level. As an example, data from the Organization for

Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), shows that the rate of employment in Sweden is estimated at 74% (for people between the ages of 15-74 years), this figure is far higher than the OECD average of 66% (OECD, 2013). This positive data has been attributed to the result of well implemented institutional policies, such as the Swedish labour market access training program “Arbetsmarknadsutbildning” (AMU), (Kvist, 2012). The program is aimed at equipping intending workers (including the immigrants from Africa) with diverse skills based on the needs of the market; increase their job mobility; encourage them to accept available jobs (backed by generous incentives), thereby reducing unemployment and stimulating the economy for growth (Garsten, et al, 2004). However, despite this positive outlook, there still exist stiff competitions for available jobs as a result of the persistence of unemployment. The Swedish labour market is intertwined with the global market and as such is affected by fluctuations in the global market arena. Figures from SCB statistics Sweden (2014), shows current unemployment rate in Sweden at 8.7% and the situation is even worse among the youths between the ages of 15-24, which records unemployment as high as 20%. Studies have shown that immigrants are mostly affected by unemployment in Sweden (Rydgren, 2004).

Moving to a new country is usually accompanied by diverse expectations. African immigrants comprise a considerable number of recent arrivals in Sweden, and like other immigrants across the globe they are expected to secure employment in order to survive and adjust to their new environment. However, there appears to be difficulties accessing the labour market. According to Syed, (2008), immigrants ability to access the labour market of their host countries are dependent on their ability to overcome barriers such as discrimination, human capital re-evaluation and work experience, host country economic situation, changing demands in the labour markets, and socio-cultural differences with the host country. Specifically in Sweden, Kvist, (2012), believes that the most common barriers immigrants often face before accessing the labour market includes - human capital re-evaluation, discrimination and lack of network.

To make sense of their employability, the African immigrants in this study will need to break the above mentioned barriers, by firstly considering the impact of the re-evaluation of their human capital upon arrival in Sweden. Studies have shown that human capital re-evaluation processes often results in the under-value or outright rejection of certain qualifications, leaving the affected

individuals with the option of either assuming a lower status for employment purposes or re-training in order to fit into available opportunities (Girard and Boudier, 2005). The responsibility for Human capital re-evaluation (recognition of foreign qualifications) in Sweden lies with the Swedish Council for Higher Education (Universitets- och högskolerådet, 2013). Their activities involves the evaluation of qualifications obtained from immigrants home countries and ascertain the Swedish equivalent for those wishing to further their studies, as well as issue statements for use in job applications for those looking for job (Universitets- och högskolerådet, 2013).

The result of this re-evaluation could give an insight into the reason those African immigrants lucky enough to get employment (irrespective of their academic qualifications) are ubiquitous in the blue-collar sector of the Swedish economy, where employment is low-skilled and based on a limited job requirement that offers little opportunities for acquisition of complex knowledge and skills that could be reproduced in advanced skilled professions (Rydgren, 2004). Moreover, the ever changing labour market demand raises questions about the longer-term employability for these immigrant workers within the blue-collar sector (Beerepoot and Hendriks, 2013). Immigrants from Africa are among the groups with higher unemployment rate and low income, and statistics from the 'Swedish Labour Board' shows that they comprise a higher percentage of low-skilled workers in the economy, especially among cleaning, restaurant, health-care assistants and other unskilled manual labour (Rydgren, 2004).

Another much researched barrier that could affect how African immigrants in this study make sense of their employability in the Swedish labour market concerns the issue of discrimination (Bevelander, 2000; Scott, 1999; Broomé, Bäcklund, Lundh, and Ohlsson, 1996; Bevelander and Nielsen, 2004; Arai and Vilhelmsson, 2004). Studies have shown that the callback rates for job applicants with Swedish names are far higher than those of applicants with non-Swedish names (Carlsson and Rooth, 2007). Further research by Rydgren, (2004), have also shown that there exists extensive individual and institutional discrimination of non-Europeans in the Swedish labour market. The study reveals the presence of 'key actors' in the recruitment sector of the economy working as gatekeepers, with the specific responsibility of keeping non-European immigrants away through the implementation of hiring policies that lay emphasis on 'stereotypical and prejudiced group-specific characteristics, as against individual skills (Rydgren, 2004). Another finding by Arai and Vilhelmsson, (2004), shows that immigrants also face

discrimination in the labour market as a result of deliberate practice of skewing the seniority rules by both the labour unions and employers in favor of native workers.

Finally, African immigrants will need to consider the issue of their social capital in the process of making sense of their employability. Immigrants' social capital (in form of networks) could be very rewarding to their employability, but the kinds of network they are exposed to can affect their chances of accessing available job opportunities. Results from Kanas, Van Tubergen, and Van der Lippe, (2011), shows that having network made up of friends and relatives from ones ethnic group, as well as been very active in such a group does not increase an immigrants chances of getting a job. On the other hand, having a network made of natives from the host country gives the immigrant a better chance of securing an employment. According to Hofstede, (2001), the Swedish society is mainly individualistic. However there still exist very strong social ties among Swedes that could be beneficial to the job opportunities of immigrants that find themselves in such a network.

The thresholds mentioned above represents a general overview of issues most immigrants usually encounter in their host countries as highlighted by various researchers. However, the impact of these thresholds on how the respondents in this study make sense of their employability will be highlighted at the end of the study.

1.3. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTION

The employability of African Immigrants' in Sweden is dependent on their ability to cross the above mentioned barriers such as human capital re-evaluation and discrimination etc. (Kvist, 2012; Syed, 2008). It is also dependent on the availability of jobs, as well as the individual's attractiveness and ability to market their skills to employers. This ability is re-enforced by the strength of their accumulated human capital, which is evidenced by years of schooling, on-the-job-training and work experience (Garsten, et al, 2004).

The purpose of this research is to capture the perspectives of a group of African immigrant's in the blue-collar sector of the Swedish labour market, regarding how they make sense of their employability, by looking at how they negotiate their ways in the Swedish labour market at different situations and junctures. The study will explore how the immigrants have combined their knowledge, competencies, privileges and social networks to break barriers of entrance and establish themselves in the blue-collar sector of the labour market. With the above purpose in focus, this study attempts to answer the research question below:

1. How do African immigrants' blue-collar workers make sense of their employability in the labour market in Sweden?

In order to achieve this purpose and answer the research question, this study will use the stories of a group of African immigrants in the blue-collar sector of the Swedish labour market, to figure out how they negotiate their ways in the labour market by discovering:

- I. What the immigrants' employability expectations were before they moved to Sweden, based on their prior skills, as well as knowledge of the Swedish labour market;
- II. How they experienced the reality upon arrival, by way of understanding if their expectations corresponded with their realities;
- III. And finally, how they adjusted to the realities of the labour market, by way of knowing what necessary steps they took to improve their chances of accessing available job opportunities.

2. PREVIOUS STUDIES

2.1. PREVIOUS STUDIES OF EMPLOYABILITY

This section presents the review of existing literature on employability and highlights other important concepts that emerge from that subject area. Garsten et al, (2004), explore employability as a concept that captures the relationship between work, competence and learning, and how it relates to the ability of individuals to meet the changing demands of the labour market. The authors submit that the concept relates to job security, which is highly determined by individuals' human capital. They assume that as a result of constant changes in work relationship between the organization and their members, employees are expected to be flexible in order to maintain their attractiveness to the labour market.

2.2 HUMAN CAPITAL

Studies of the employability of African immigrants in the Swedish labour market will be incomplete without mentioning the human capital of the individuals in question. This vital concept emerges whenever the issue of employability is raised. Hillage and Pollard, (1998), describes it as an individual's 'employability assets' which includes their knowledge, skills and attitudes. Becker, (2009), on the other hand, assumes that human capital is the human assets individuals accumulate over time to enhance their values. According to the author, it represents all the positive attributes that enhances a person's standing and makes them attractive to others.

Human capital comes in form of 'intermediate assets' knowledge and skills (acquired through education and training), 'baseline assets' personal attributes like punctuality and honesty, and 'high level assets' such as team work, self-management, and commercial awareness (Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Becker, 2009). Becker, (2009), emphasizes that knowledge and skills acquired through education and training are permanently attached to a person, which means they are inseparable from the person and highly impossible to be moved the same way as other forms of capital. The author reason however that how individual employees make sense of their

employability could be highly dependent on the mode of human capital acquisition – which could either be through ‘on-the-job-training’ or formal school education, which are both beneficial in raising the level of employability of an individual. Becker, (2009), points out that there is a conflict of opinion by human capital theorists about what form of training should get more credit for the benefits accruing to education and training – formal schooling or ‘on –the-job-training’. The author opines that while supporters of formal schooling asserts that schooling leads to increase in earnings and productivity as a result of higher knowledge and skills in problem analysis, others disagree and give such credit to ‘on-the-job-training’ based on the premise that formal schooling mainly stresses ‘credentialism’.

2.3. CREDENTIALISM

Another emerging concept from the study of employability and human capital acquisition is credentialism. Becker, (2009), remarks that credentialism is a set of information that merely shows an individual’s valuable traits (such as potential, abilities, persistence), and supporters of ‘on–the-job-training’ criticizes the concept on the premise that companies need workers with practical skills evidenced by an employee’s work experience, ability to function in a group and ability to please customers. They also centered their criticism on the fact that individuals require other positive attributes (such as company defined discipline and honesty) and not mere performance in class (as evidenced by academic qualifications) to remain employed in an organization.

The author finds that critiques of credentialism however often omit the fact that the knowledge acquired in formal higher education training is very important in technologically advanced economies especially in this era of knowledge based economy, and also they often do not mention the changes in school curriculum that has taken place over time – which emphasizes intermittent practical trainings (in form of internships). It needs to be pointed out that given that this study relates to a group of African immigrants working in the low-skilled blue-collar sector of the Swedish economy, the author strongly supports ‘on–the-job-training’ as against higher academic qualifications with the assumption that higher academic qualifications might be less relevant in their situation.

2.4. ROLE OF LABOUR MARKET ACTORS

Furthermore, the study of employability has also shed light on the understanding of the roles played by the different labour market actors. The concept of employability has been studied by several researchers to highlight the perspectives of different labour markets actors - individuals, organizations and institutions (Rothwell, Jewell and Hardie, 2009; Garsten, et al, 2004; Hillage and Pollard, (1998).

2.4.1. INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

According to Rothwell, Jewell and Hardie, (2009), looking at employability from the perspective of the individual relates to the various initiatives taken by individual employees to become attractive to the labour market. Hillage and Pollard, (1998), describes employability as an individual's ability to gain initial employment, retain employment and obtain new employment if the need arises. They further reason that an individual's ability to achieve this fit is dependent on the strength of their human capital, the ability to deploy them, present them to employers and most importantly the individual circumstances and situation in the labour market. Garsten, et al, (2004), in agreement emphasized that employability is expected to drive individuals to be responsible for their own careers, by taking steps that will enable them withstand the turbulence in the organizational environment and stay relevant in the very dynamic employment relations. They also argue that employability is expected to be an answer to job insecurity in today's labour market, given that the concept is not only applicable to the unemployed, but also to those employed either adequately or inadequately (individuals employed in jobs that are lower than their qualifications). Garsten, et al, (2004), in continuation of their earlier argument, maintains that individuals' employability could be enhanced through continuous learning and skills acquisitions. They remark that current trends in the labour market have witnessed a shift from academic qualifications to practical competency and continuous learning, as necessary criteria for either getting employed or staying employed. Other studies have also found that individual employee's perception of employability is derived from a combination of factors, which includes continuous knowledge and skills acquisition, the embodiment of defined values and attitudes (such as initiative, flexibility, availability, trust and loyalty), as well as the ability to adapt to current and prospective employers changing needs (Berntson, Sverke and Marklund, 2006; De Vos, De Hauw and Van der Heijden, 2011). Garsten, et al, (2004), believes that the reason for

undertaking continuous life-long learning is speedily shifting from self-aggrandizement (the fulfilment of self), to making one attractive and adaptable to socio-economic needs of the dynamic labour market. Consequently, they suggest that individual employees are currently expected to initiate the processes of taking advantage of the opportunities available in the market to enable them update their knowledge and skills in order to secure employment as well as be able to stay employed.

2.4.2. ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

On the concept of employability from the organizational perspective, Berntson, Sverke and Marklund, (2006), submit that going by the traditional employment relations the employer was required to provide jobs as well as ensure the security of such jobs through life-long employment contracts. This has been the trend in most European economies until re-occurrence of mass unemployment in most European countries in the 1970's, resulted in the re-allocation of responsibilities between the main players in the labour market (Garsten, et al, 2004). They reckoned that in reaction, organizations were required to find ways to achieve flexibility in order to survive and stay competitive in the global market. They declare that the options available to organizations includes re-negotiation with other labour market actors - which means, in place of standardized employment contracts (that guarantees job for life), organizations now approach the labour market with offers for the de-regulation of employment through - variance/amendment to the labour laws, employment contracts, work tasks and the resort to non-standard forms of employment (such as use of temps) (Garsten, et al, 2004).

Hillage and Pollard, (1998), argues that the concept from organizational approach has led employers to prioritize the development of human capital of key individuals in the organization. They assume that this measure is taken to boost the employees' sense of job security, enhance their flexibility and raise their commitment by encouraging them to take risks for the interest of the organization.

2.4.3. INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

Rothwell, Jewell and Hardie, (2009), find that looking at employability from the institutional perspective relates to the adoption of various national policy interventions by various governments. McQuaid & Lindsay, (2005), declares that the concept currently occupies a prime position in labour market policies both in individual European Union countries and at the supranational level. They remark that it is one of the four initial pillars of the European Employment Strategy which originated from the November 1997 Extraordinary European Council on employment Summit. Hillage and Pollard, (1998), believe that such institutional policies are aimed at enhancing the job opportunities of potential priority groups such as new arrivals, re-entrants, disadvantaged as well as under-employed workers. They emphasize that the role of government in improving the competency of the workforce, (especially at the blue-collar levels) is vital to enhance their flexibility and competitiveness in the labour market.

Garsten, et al, (2004), also points out that different European economies have approached the concept of employability through the adoption of different influential models. They observe that some has strictly followed the trend using the Anglo-Saxon model that views unemployment as a balance between ‘quality/price ratio’, and advocates an employment policy that will stimulate companies by maneuvering this ratio of ‘training/labour costs reduction’ when hiring new employees. According to the authors, others (such as Sweden) has adapted to the Scandinavian model which on the other hand views unemployment as a collective responsibility that requires public intervention policies.

Kvist, (2012), studied the Scandinavian model (implemented in Sweden to broaden access to the Swedish labour market), and finds that unemployed immigrants are given special attention through the Swedish labour market training program “Arbetsmarknadsutbildning” (AMU), usually administered by the public employment agency (Arbetsformedlingen). According to the author, the aim of this program is to train and re-train immigrants to give them a brighter chance of succeeding in the competitive job market. The author emphasizes that the program begins with the study of the Swedish language and cultural orientation (which leads to the sharpening of the immigrant’s communication skills as well as enhances and quicken their integration into the

Swedish cultural environment), and continues with training on work related skills of various lengths of time (depending on the area of competence and choice of the immigrant involved) and ends with network building. In summation, the author is of the opinion that the programme aims to develop the competence of all the participants, despite the difference in their level of education and cognitive ability. As a result, Kvist, (2012) concludes that the difference in competency level of the participating immigrants does not diminish the quality outcomes of the training, given that the programme was not focused solely on groups with high level of cognitive ability. According to the author, such focus would have led to unnecessary exclusion of the affected immigrants from participating in the program which will in turn negate the main purpose of the training programme.

2.5. EXPECTATION OF EMPLOYABILITY

Rothwell, Jewell and Hardie (2009), interviewed a group of graduate-level students at a business school about the expectation and perception of employability, and came to the conclusion that ‘the university’s reputation, individual initiative, labor market demands, and the individuals’ academic performance influences their perception of employability. According to the authors, while the reputation of the university has a very significant influence (due to the increasing competition for talents as well as the commitment of the universities), student’s participation in class and academic performance (except post-graduate studies) does not have significant influence. This supports the earlier mentioned criticisms leveled against formal schooling as mere ‘credentialism’, as against practical knowledge and skills that make individuals more attractive to the labour market. It needs to be pointed out that the characteristics of the African immigrants involved in this study puts them on both sides of the debate of on-the-job-training and formal school education, with details to be outlined in the methods section. The Swedish adapted Scandinavian model (as mentioned earlier), however takes the above raised issues into consideration during the practical process. As an example, the programme is designed to make individual participants flexible, mobile and accessible to the labour market through vocational training, irrespective of the individuals’ previous academic achievements (Kvist, 2012).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. SENSEMAKING

The focus of this research is to uncover how African-immigrants (blue-collar employees) make sense of their employability in the Swedish labour market; the author examines how they negotiate their ways at different junctures using Weick's, (1995) sensemaking concept. Weick, (1995), approaches sensemaking as a concept that uses stories in 'placing things into frameworks, redressing surprises, constructing meanings and interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding'. Weick, (1995: 4), thereby urges researchers to view the sensemaking concept literally as making something sensible, rather than as a metaphor for understanding, interpretation and attribution.

3.2. SENSEMAKING AND EXPECTATIONS

Sensemaking, in the context of how the respondents anticipated their employability (before moving to Sweden) is based on the assumption that sensemaking and expectations often occurs side by side (Weick, 1995: 145). Expectations have been described as the starting point of the sensemaking process, and the quest for individuals to realize their expectations lead them to make self-fulfilling prophecies (Weick, 1995: 147). Merton, (1948), believes that self-fulfilling prophecies are initial false definition of a situation, which leads to plausible actions that could make the original false definition become a reality. Weick, (1995: 147), on the other hand contends that self-fulfilling prophecies are unfinished business that could either result from true or false prediction of situations. As a result when expectations breakdown (as a result of false predictions), people are very likely to experience interruptions in their lives, hence the needed to understand how the African immigrants in this study negotiate their ways through the rigours of the Swedish labour market and cope with the unwanted outcomes of their expectations. It needs to be remarked however, that sensemaking is centered on the fact that individuals does not rely on the perfect accuracy of their predictions, rather they trust on those that are credible, believable, interesting and emotionally appealing, and in that respect individuals usually make the choice of plausibility over accuracy in sensemaking (Weick, 1995: 56). As a result, Weick,

(1983), contend that the prediction of employability by the African immigrants in this study does not need to be accurate, but plausible enough to stimulate them to act with great energy that could give rise to fulfilment of their expectations.

3.3. SENSEMAKING AND ACTUAL EXPERIENCE

Uncovering how the respondents in this study experienced the reality of the labour market (after arrival in Sweden), is based on the assumption that sensemaking involves distinct elements of ‘surprise, contrast, and change’, that greets new arrivals in a given society (Louis, 1980). Louis, (1980), remarks that change should be viewed as the difficulties faced by new entrants regarding location, title and remuneration; contrasts should be approached as the different ways of life they have to adjust in their new environment; while surprise should be understood as the exposure of the mismatch between their current experiences and their prior anticipations.

3.4. SENSEMAKING AND ADJUSTMENT

Getting a clearer picture of how the respondents’ sensemaking is affected during the process of adjustment to the realities of the labour market is mainly based on their ability to cope. Louis, (1980), assumes that sensemaking acts as a conscious way of coping with unusual experiences, by critically questioning things that happen out of the ordinary. As a result, individuals need to raise their level of cognition in order to cope with elements of surprise evoked by unusual happenings. This is because people rarely use conscious thought in everyday activities except when something unusual is noticed, because they usually act unconsciously given that most activities are done as common pre-programmed routines (Louis, 1980). Uncovering how individuals’ adjustment to situations influences their perceptions, is also based on the assumption that sensemaking is equipped with the ability to act as a progressive clarification of human situations (Weick, 1995: 11). This ability is described as an important property of sensemaking often evoked to produce reverse outcomes that helps to develop initial definition of a situation, and in other words sensemaking in essence propels an individual to take steps to realize the outcomes of their initial expectations (Weick, 1995: 11).

3.5. SENSEMAKING AND STORYTELLING

The theoretical lens guiding this study is further based on the recognition of the importance of sensemaking and storytelling (Maclean, Harvey, & Chia, 2012). Weick, (1995: 61), declares that the most important need of sensemaking is a good story. According to Sharf, (2009), the ability of an individual to make sense of their experiences requires storied reflection of such experiences in a variety of contexts. Weick, (1995: 61), believes that a good story ties together contrasting portions of events, long enough to stimulate and steer an individual to take plausible actions that could make retrospective sense of any event. Czarniawska, (2004), in agreement observes that in sensemaking individuals tell their stories in 'bits and pieces', with several interruptions that accord the researchers the opportunity to ask for clarifications. The stories of the African immigrants participating in this study will help us unravel how they make sense of their employability, by focusing on how they appraising the labour market at every situation and juncture. Stories are basic sensemaking devices that aids the respondents make sense of their experiences, acquired through continuous interactions with the environment and others. A story in this case is described according to Ricoeur (1984: 150), as -

“a sequence of actions or experiences done or undergone by a certain number of people, whether real or imaginary”.

The narrators are either presented in situations of change or response to change, while these changes in turn uncover concealed details of situations as well as the individuals involved, and generate other difficulties that need actions or thoughts (Ricoeur, 1984: 150). Boje, (2001), further describes a story as an 'antenarrative' - a chronological account of events that precedes a narrative and usually comes without plot, has fragmented coherence, non-linear and in form of a pre-narrative speculation.

3.6. APPLICATION OF THE SENSEMAKING CONCEPT

The sensemaking concept could be better understood and applied by exploring a set of characteristics outlined by Weick, (1995: 61- 62), in order to unravel individuals' sensemaking processes. These characteristics were carefully selected for the reason of their frequency in usage and applicability in sensemaking researches, and also each of them embodies the relevant features of sensemaking such as 'action and context' (Weick, 1995: 18). These outlined features according to Weick, (1995: 17), differentiate sensemaking from explanatory processes such as understanding, interpretation and attribution. As a result, the essence is to serve as a direction for a better appreciation of what constitutes sensemaking, and identify any drawbacks that relates to how it functions (Weick, 1995: 18).

3.6.1. IDENTITY – DISCOVERING THE SELF IN AN ENVIRONMENT

The possibility of the African immigrants in this study to negotiate their ways in the Swedish labour market and make sense of their employability requires the need to discover who they are in that environment. Identity is based on the assumption that there is an inherent need for individuals to have a sense of identity, based on the discovery of how they make sense of their situations (Weick. 1995: 20). Irrespective of the respondents' main purpose of coming to Sweden, they all have expectations of job opportunities, given that they need to work in order to survive as well as adapt to their new environment. However, accessing the available job opportunities might sometimes require them to alter their lives in certain ways in order to fit into the environment. The need to redefine one's identity emanates from the desire to achieve self enhancement through the maintenance of positive and affective state of self (Weick. 1995: 20). In order to enhance their employability, the respondents in this study needed to discover who they were at every point of their interaction within the given environment. In that regards, identity constructs the individual as the 'sensemaker' that undergoes continuous redefinition of self during the process of interaction, at different situations and with different others (Weick. 1995: 20).

This process is also necessary for them to fit into available job opportunities, by appearing efficacious, consistent and competent (Weick, 1995: 20). Achieving this goal requires different initiatives at every juncture, such as re-training, self-censorship and refocusing of priorities vital to access the available job opportunities in the blue-collar sector. The opportunity to redefine the self helps an individual to minimize the discomfort experienced when predictions run contrary to realities, and in addition when individuals fail to confirm self and redefine it, they face the burden of controlled and intentional sensemaking (Steel, 1988; Weick, 1995: 23). The respondents learn about their identities when they project them in different situations and observe the consequences based on other people's reaction (Steel, 1988).

3.6.2. RETROSPECT – REFLECTING ON PAST EXPERIENCES

Weick, (1995: 24), reasons that an individual's lived experience defines and influences how they make sense of their present situation. The term 'lived' in the opinion of the author, infers that the ability of individuals to recognize what they are doing could only be possible after its completion. For the African immigrants to make sense of their employability, they need to reflect on past course of events, given that whatever activity that is happening at the moment is the continuation of the previous (Schutz, 1967). Accessing lived experiences requires an individual to be distance removed from such experiences and direct attention to it through the act of reflection (Schutz, 1967). Individuals' attention to their lived experiences leads to the creation of meaning, and given that individuals only know their actions after they are completed, they are likely to be biased all the time when recollecting past experiences and such biasness might likely influence the new meaning being created from the experience (Schutz, 1967).

3.6.3. ENACTMENT – CREATING YOUR OWN ENVIRONMENT

Weick, (1995: 30), assumes that individual's environment are influenced by the situations which they create, control and look back to from time to time in order to predict further actions. This theoretical point of view recognizes individuals as part of the environments they make and in accordance with their creations, usually act either to their detriment or benefit. The African immigrants in this study needs to make sense of their employability by matching their expectations with actual experiences of the labour market. The outcome of this process determines whether they could fit in directly, or need adjustment i.e., to create a new environment where they could fit into. It needs to be pointed out that the job environment differs from both the study environment and the humanitarian environments (which most of the respondents are located), and transitioning from one to the other might require the creative ability of the individual in question. There seems to be co-determination going on in individuals' sensemaking process, as they create environments either as a response to situations, or their activities helped to produces the situations. Accordingly, there is a mutual influence of thoughts, cause and effects as well as stimulus-response between the individual and the environment they create (Follet, 1924; Weick, 1995: 33).

3.6.4. SOCIAL – INTERACTING WITH THE OTHER

Social interactions will enable the African immigrants in this study identify and redefine themselves, enact suitable environments and consequently make better sense of their employability in the Swedish labour market. Weick, (1995: 38), postulates that interactions and shared experiences between individuals influence how they make sense of their environment. This is based on the assumption that human thinking and social interactions complements one another, hence sensemaking is not viewed solely on the individual level of analysis (Resnick, Levine and Teasley, 1991). There is the need to recognize that individual's thoughts are created during the process of interaction with others, before it is communicated to the general public for assessment (Kahlbaugh, 1993). Social interaction between the respondents and others enables them to pay attention to the activities of others, thereby take a cue from their observations to

redirect their own activities to better suit their situations (Blummer, 1969). Understanding the importance of social interaction to the respondents' sensemaking process could be likened to a stranger that requires the knowledge of the native vernacular, in order to alter better expressions and make reasonable interpretations (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Louis, 1980; Schultz, 1964).

3.6.5. ONGOING – CONTINUOUS JOURNEY EMBEDDED WITH INTERRUPTIONS AND EMOTIONS

Weick, (1995: 43), assumes that an individual's sensemaking is an 'ongoing project' which battles for relevance with other events happening around them and thereby liable for changes at every stage as a result. This notion recognizes that people are always engaged in things that have no definite durations, and the only way individuals make sense is to cut a moment out of the ongoing things and reflect upon it. In the case of the group of immigrants in this study, becoming employable requires constant physical and emotional struggle with other things going on simultaneously around them (Weick, 1995: 45). As a result, their perception becomes influenced by feelings and emotions when these other events happening simultaneously, interrupts the normal flow of events (Bersched, 1983; Mandler, 1984). Weick, (1995: 47), remarks that interruption in sensemaking is a way to show that there have been important changes in the environment and emotions surfaces when this interruption affects expectations. On the other hand, emotion is vital in sensemaking given that the ability to recall and retrospect depends on the emotional effect on the immigrants; as a result, their ability to recall earlier events is highly dependent on how it evokes positive or negative emotions (Weick, 1995: 49).

3.6.6. EXTRACTED CUES – REPRESENTING THE WHOLE WITH A PART

Weick, (1995: 50), opines that extracted cues relates to how individuals extract a tiny part from a whole and give meaning to it as a result of the familiarity and relevance of that portion to their experiences. Extracted cues serve as a point of reference that gives clues to the understanding of the whole from a tiny part (Smirchich and Morgan, 1982). It could be assumed that the

immigrants in this study make sense of their employability, by taking notice of conspicuous material-events such as information that appears unpleasant, unusual, extreme or deviant, and convert them into something comprehensible as a context for sensemaking (Kiesler and Sproulls, 1982).

3.6.7. PLAUSIBILITY – RELYING ON PREDICTIONS

This characteristic recognizes the respondents' choice of plausibility over accuracy in sensemaking. According to Weick, (1995: 56), sensemaking is centered on the fact that individuals does not rely on the accuracy of their predictions, rather they trust on those that are credible, believable, interesting and emotionally appealing. Furthermore, in order to make sense, individuals' predictions do not need to be accurate, but plausible enough to stimulate them to act with great energy that could give rise to reasonable conduct (Weick, 1983). In the case of the African immigrants in this study, making sense of their employability will depend on the plausibility of all the characteristics described above. This includes how they make sense of their re-defined identities resulting from actual experiences and social interactions, the kind of environments they enact based on the cues they extract from lived experiences, as well as how they adjust to emotional and physical interruptions in their struggle to be employable in the blue collar sector of the Swedish labour market.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is conducted using qualitative research approach which seeks to unravel how people locate themselves in their social environment and make sense of their experiences (Josselson, 2013: 3). The research will be based on the subjective point of view of the participants, in the form of ‘storytelling’ about how they give meaning to their abilities of securing and maintaining employment in the Swedish labour market. The use of storytelling is the most authentic way an individual can communicate what goes on inside of them and how that relates to others. It is also a reliable way for individuals to express how they make sense of the past, engage the present and anticipate the future (Josselson, 2013: 3).

4.1. PARTICIPANTS

The target population for the study is a group of African immigrants’ blue-collar workers within the city of Gothenburg. The selection of African immigrants from the blue-collar sector for this study was based on their struggle in accessing the Swedish labour market, as a result of the numerous barriers outlined earlier in the introduction section. Another important reason was, irrespective of their level of education, the low-skilled blue collar jobs seems to be the opportunities accessible to them, hence their over-representation in that sector of the Swedish economy. The need to explore their situation arose with the realization that despite their over-representation in this sector and their contribution to the economy, they are rarely mentioned in scholarly studies in Sweden. Finally, the need to focus on immigrants workers at the blue-collar sector arose from the fact that the concept of ‘employability’ is often treated in most studies as a fancy academic concept that focuses on university graduates aiming for white-collar jobs, with little or no research about blue-collar workers. In contrast however, most government intervention programmes (such as the Swedish labour market access programme mentioned earlier) are mainly geared towards preparing individuals to fit into available opportunities at the blue-collar sector irrespective of their previous educational qualifications.

Participants are selected using a network model, by selecting strategically identified individuals (relevant to the study), who in-turn recommend other participants who might be suitable for the study (Josselson, 2013). They were selected from different service areas as the study will not be

limited to one particular blue-collar job. To be qualified as a participant in this inquiry, the immigrants needed to have been an actor on the labour market and not merely a witness. They needed to have gone through immigration process, the labour market training programs mentioned earlier, worked/still working as blue-collar workers and willing to open up and tell their stories.

The interviewees presented for analysis comprise fourteen blue-collar employees in different service areas working with different firms within the city of Gothenburg. The respondents vary based on the following characteristics - their country of origin; sex; the job sector they are currently employed; purpose of migration and level of education. The purpose is to help understand how their perception of employability is coloured by the above characteristics. It will also give an insight into how they predicted, experienced and adjusted to the labour market based on the various skills they have obtained both from previous education, labour market related programs and on-the-job-training experiences. With this understanding, it will become clearer how the participants negotiated their ways at every juncture and enhanced their employability in the labour market.

The interviewees are currently employed in different market sectors; Logistics (transportation and delivery (5 employees); building and construction (2 employees); food processing and restaurant (3 employees) and Facility management and maintenance (4 employees). They are made up of four females and ten males between the ages of Twenty-eight and Forty-nine. Three of the females are married, while seven of the males are married. They are originally from: Nigeria; Cameroun; Libya; Uganda; Somalia; Ethiopia; Ghana; South Africa.

Five of the participants (Two from Cameroun and one each from Nigeria, Uganda and Ethiopia) have university qualification. Four (one each from Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa and Libya) has secondary education. While five (Two from Somalia and one each from Nigeria, Uganda and Ethiopia) has either primary or no formal education.

Their purpose of immigrating to Sweden varies from in pursuit of further education, family reunion, work and on humanitarian grounds. Four of the participants (Two from Cameroun, one each from Uganda and Ethiopia), all with higher education qualification came to Sweden for further education. Five of the participants moved to Sweden as refugees (Two from Somalia, one

each from Libya, Ethiopia and Uganda). Four of the participants moved to Sweden for marriage or re-unite with their partners and family members. Two of them came from Nigeria (one with university education and one with primary education qualification). The others are one each from South Africa and Ghana, both with secondary education qualification. And finally one of the participants from Nigeria, with secondary education qualification came to Sweden to work.

For the sake of analysis the participants are represented anonymously using the abbreviation (R1 – R14), and against each acronym is the interviewees country of origin, sex, the job sector they are currently employed, purpose of migration and level of education. For more details see the table below.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents

Respondents	Country of Origin	Sex	Job Sector	Reason for migration	Level of Education
R1	Nigeria	Female	FPR	Reunion	Secondary
R2	Nigeria	Male	FMM	Education	University
R3	Nigeria	Male	LTD	Work	University
R4	Cameroun	Male	LTD	Education	University
R5	Cameroun	Male	BC	Education	University
R6	Uganda	Female	FMM	Education	University
R7	Uganda	Male	BC	Refugee	Primary/None
R8	Somalia	Male	BC	Refugee	Primary/None
R9	Somalia	Male	FPR	Refugee	Primary/None
R10	Ethiopia	Female	LTD	Reunion	Primary/None
R11	Ethiopia	Male	FMM	Refugee	Primary/None
R12	Libya	Male	FPR	Refugee	Secondary
R13	Ghana	Male	FMM	Reunion	Secondary
R14	South Africa	Female	FPR	Reunion	Secondary

(Abbreviation of job sector: LTD denotes Logistics (Transport and Delivery); BC – Building and Construction; FMM – Facility Management and Maintenance; FPR – Food Processing and Restaurant.)

4.2. DATA COLLECTION

Given that the research question points to how individuals from a given sub-group (in this case African-immigrants blue-collar workers) make sense of a certain phenomenon (their employability), the main technique used to gather information was semi-structured interviews. Interviewing as a technique gives participants a better opportunity to tell their stories in the way they feel comfortable, as well as enables the researcher access rich descriptive insight into the studied phenomenon (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Narrative interviews according to Josselson, (2013: 10), needs to be open-ended and extended, beginning with the researchers lead then giving way to the control of the storyteller since they are the major focus of the inquiry. Narrative interviewing is considerably different from other interviews because it should be mainly unstructured, bounded and open-ended, which means it is not structured on the usual question-and-answer format; rather it is bounded by the research question and the objective of the study (Josselson, 2013: 10). The interviews are both face to face (physical presence), distance (by telephone and long distance means of communication) at the convenience of the respective interviewee. Attempts have been made to ensure that all the interviews are tape recorded and conducted in a very relaxed and conversational atmosphere with the permission of the participants. The interview questions are many but comprehensive and was able to capture the objectives of the study, in order to answer the research questions.

The researcher gathered stories from the different participants with specific focus on the study area – how they make sense of their employability in the Swedish labour market. There were several intermittent interruptions during their story telling because they were over-concentrating on areas that were not the focus of the research. In the process, follow-up questions were used to redirect them to the topic area.

The use of semi-structured interviews fitted well with the explored topic of how African immigrants blue collar workers, make sense of their employability, in order to enhance the validity and reliability of the data. All the participants were interviewed separately since some of them had university education, while some had only primary or no formal education opportunities and may not be comfortable answering questions in groups. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed participants to shape the research interaction according to their own experiences and expectations in a more comfortable manner using the different languages

we share in common. Two of the participants from Nigeria told their stories in three languages interchangeably (English, Igbo and Pidgin English), four other participants (one each from Nigeria and Ghana and two from Cameroun) spoke both English and Pidgin English interchangeably as we all understand these languages in common. The remaining participants told their stories only in English, since that is the only language we understand in common.

Secondary sources were also vital for this study. This involves various data that has been collected by other scholars and for other reasons rather than for the purpose of this research. For this research, the secondary data reviewed were diverse literatures covering the entire study from employability, migration to Sweden and sensemaking etc. The method of selecting the secondary sources was through online search engines using the Gothenburg university library database collection as well as Google scholar. Apart from a few literatures collected physically from the library (in printed forms), all others were available on the university library online database in form of published articles by academic journals as well as e-books and audio-books.

4.3. INTERVIEW PROCESS

The interview process began with the researcher giving a brief overview of what the study is all about and the goals it is meant to achieve, thereafter each participant was allowed to ask questions about how to approach any part of the interview they might not feel comfortable talking about. This is to get their consent as well as feel comfortable before the interview proceeds. Every interview began with general demographic questions for all the participants and covered areas such as name, age, sex, education and country of origin. This enhanced the researcher's ability to put the different participants' responses into context and determine the relevant questions that was posed next.

The interview moved to the participants' anticipation of the job market and what their expectations were upon arrival in Sweden. They were asked to tell stories about how they their jobs back home, their decision to move to Sweden and their expectations of getting a job upon arrival. Given the analogy that participants are on different levels of formal education, the questions are selected with such considerations in mind, in order to avoid posing unsuitable

questions that might make a participant uncomfortable. Some of the participants had only worked in an informal setting before moving to Sweden, hence were hesitant to go into details, but they were reassured of the importance of such details to the research.

The interview continued further to the period after their arrival in Sweden, where they were asked to narrate their experiences in the labour market. This section of the interview was somewhat chaotic as almost every participant has a lot to say about this period. The chaos was as a result of the language requirement and skills mismatch occasioned by the re-evaluation process. It was most noticeable among the participants with university qualification and those with specific skills training such as driving. The researcher made use of follow up questions to redirect them whenever they went off-course, and that method worked really well.

In the final part of the interview, the participants were asked to tell how they coped and adjusted to the realities they faced in the labour market. The questions are many, but they are selected with the assumption that a participant will cover as many of the questions with just one question. Follow-up questions were needed to cover the areas not properly covered. Three of the four female participants had their interviews broken into two halves for their convenience due to domestic issues. The individual interviews lasted from 25-60 minutes in length.

4.4. METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

For the purpose of this research, data will be presented and analyzed with focus on a combination of meaning and language, using the 'bricolage' interpretive technique (Kvale, 2008). Bricolage has been described as the most commonly used technique of interview, as it gives the researcher the leverage to move freely using a combination of several analytical techniques (Kvale, 2008). The major reason for using mixed technique comes as a result of the complicatedness encountered during the interview process, relating to the diverse characteristics of the respondents as outlined earlier in the method section. For example, the language of the interview differed from one participant to another. As discovered by the researcher during the interview process, the use of parables and metaphors is common when using a language (of common heritage) shared between the interviewer and a participant. Moreover, majority of the participants has been known to the researcher for quite some time prior to the study; hence the

interview process with those individuals was more casual and often involved the use of pseudonyms and euphemisms compared to the less known participants.

It should be noted that interview stories are very cumbersome to transcribe and analyze with limited structure, given that individuals will usually begin their stories from the point that matters most to them (Dibley, 2011). As a result, the process of transcription and analysis took different steps based on Kvale's, (2008) outlined guidelines. Analysis started during the interview process, with the questions posed to the participants in a fairly comprehensive language as set out in the interview guide. This process of simplification and semi-structuralization enhanced the process by making the participants' stories clear and straight to the point, thereby requiring no specific interpretation and explanation either from the interviewer or the participants (Kvale, 2008). In situations where the interpretation was not clear during the interview, the interviewer sends the meaning back to the participant in order to clarify what they actually meant. This is usually done to cross out any conflicting understandings of themes, given that participants can sometimes have multiple and contradicting understanding of the issue in focus (Kvale, 2008). This method allowed the researcher to get instant confirmation of what the individual participant actually meant.

Analyzing with a focus on meaning entails coding, condensation and interpretation of meaning, while the focus on language involves linguistic, conversation and narrative analyses (Kvale, 2008). After the transcription of the interviews and the review of the interview notes, the data was coded, condensed and interpreted to identify the specific meanings using grounded theory approach (Kvale, 2008). Furthermore, part of the data was also given linguistic, conversation and narrative analyses with focus on language. This part of the data involved interviews carried out with some of the previously known participants in Igbo and Pidgin-English, as well as conversations involving the use of different figures of speech mentioned earlier. This part of the analysis was carried out on the spot (during the interview process).

4.5. VALIDITY, RELIABILITY AND GENERALIZABILITY

The issue of validity and reliability concerns the degree of accuracy of the collected data, as well as the extent the research findings captured the intended objective of the study (Saunders et al., 2009). To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, preliminary interviews were carried out on two of the participants to get an idea of what to expect from the main scheduled interviews. This led to the restructuring of the interview guide into segments to ensure that each section is covered by a set of relevant questions. The Interview guide has lots of questions and several of them are overlapping questions, however given that it is in form of storytelling, most of the questions were covered in one fell swoop. The interview questions have been structured in such a way that only the questions not properly covered will be probed for clarifications.

Mutual trust and understanding ensured validity and reliability of the study. According to Alvesson, (2003), the inner world (meanings, ideas, feelings, intentions) or experienced social reality of the interviewee, are accessible in an environment of trust. Some of the participants in this study have been known and observed in different contexts for quite some time and the trust that was developed during this period enabled us to have an environment in which they felt more relaxed and willing to disclose their inner thoughts than the other less known participants. For example, there is a common saying in Nigeria among returnees from Europe that ‘what happens in Europe stays in Europe’, which makes it extremely difficult to extract stories about how immigrants survive in Europe. This is even truer among immigrants with higher education, who ends up doing low skilled jobs to survive.

Also to enhance the validity and reliability, the various literatures reviewed were instrumental to the preparation of interview guide which is a set of questions that serve as a reminder to the areas that need to be covered during the interview process. The main purpose of creating an interview guide is to create flexibility and orderliness during the conduct of the interview. The questions generated covers the entire topic area being studied, and are adequate to answer the research questions as well as satisfy the aims of the study. The interview questions are open-ended in order to give the participants a wide space to narrate their stories, with detailed illustrations of the issue from their own understanding, (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

On the issue of generalizability, given that the study involved a very small number of respondents, it may be inappropriate to generalize the findings to all African immigrants in Sweden. Firstly, given that the study was carried out in one location (Gothenburg), out of several other locations within Sweden, the labour market situations (such as blue-collar job opportunities, as well as access to the available opportunities) might be different across board. Secondly, all the respondents in this study succeeded one way or the other in securing an employment, however, there might be several others that might have experienced different outcomes (irrespective of their efforts), if the research is extended to a larger population. Finally, it needs to be pointed out that the author finds self (to a certain degree) in the world of most of the respondents, as a result the findings might have some elements of bias, hence the difficulty in generalizing the results to other African immigrants in the blue-collar sector of the Swedish labour market.

4.6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

There is the need for researchers to make informed analyses of the risks their study poses to the participant's physical, psychological, legal, economic and social wellbeing (Creswell, 2013). Serious care will be taken to ensure the participants will be protected at every stage of their participation in the research. As a result, the participants, names and the name of their firms would be left anonymous as a pre-condition for granting the interviews, to allow them much freedom to express themselves. Information obtained from each participant will be used confidentially; their personal data will be released voluntarily and will be used with their individual consent. The purpose is not to 'measure, classify or judge the participants', but to give the individual participant the opportunity to recount their experiences (Creswell, 2013).

4. FINDINGS

The analysis identified three themes found to be sufficient occurrences across the entire body of the interviews, concerning how the African immigrants make sense of their employability in the Swedish labour market at different junctures and situations. The themes identified were stories of their expectations of the labour market, stories of exposure to the realities of the labour market and stories of their adjustment to the realities of the labour market. The stories of expectation include discussions on how individual participants foresaw job opportunities before moving to Sweden, based on prior information and knowledge of the Sweden labour market. The stories of exposure includes discussions of how the immigrants make sense of their employability in time, space and context, through exploration and first-hand experience of the realities of the Swedish labour market upon arrival. Finally, the respondents stories of adjustment to the realities of the labour market comprises discussions of how they make sense of employability through the processes of coping with the realities of the labour market.

5.1. STORIES OF EXPECTATIONS OF THE LABOUR MARKET

The theme Stories of expectations of the labour market was derived from analyzing series of stories covering individual participants' view about how they make sense of their employability by foreseeing the availability of job opportunities, their abilities of securing jobs and whose responsibility it was to finding them a job. The respondents stories of expectations were centered on their information and knowledge of the Swedish labour market, and based mainly on their memory of the stories told by others as well as information received using other sources. In order to understand how the participants make sense of their employability at this juncture, they were first put in a memorable mood, to reflect upon life before moving to Sweden and to recall their employment expectations. The respondents' opinions differ in their stories filled with optimism and certainty. There is a noticeable division between those with very positive outlook about their employability based on the general perception of Europe in general and Sweden in particular and

those that are indifferent giving that their situation are already been taken care of by either the government or their partners.

5.1.1. RESPONSIBILITY OF FINDING JOBS RESTS ON OTHERS

To throw more light on this issue, the respondents that moved here as refugees and family reunion were not so worried about their job opportunities before arriving Sweden. Their lack of worry was not as a result of their disinterestedness to work, but because they are quite certain that the issue of job has been taken care of by a second party. Respondent R8 said that he was not worried about job because the information they had was that it is the responsibility of the government to cater for such issues. The interviewee R8 noted that he was much concerned about getting to Sweden alive because the difficult life they were exposed to in the refugee camp back home. He continued that he was not worried about job as it was the responsibility of the government, by saying –

“We receive a lot of messages from families that were taken to Sweden and it is always good, how the government takes charge of everything so my worry like I said was to be among those going. I definitely know that life will not be the same for me when I leave”

By this comment, the respondent revealed that his concern was to get out of the country safely, given that the Swedish government will cater for every other need.

Another respondent R1 who came to reunite with her fiancé stated that she is not worried about job, because her fiancé already assured her that she would get a job. According to her, the fiancé knew that she has a very good job back home and was responsible for taking care of her younger siblings, so he knew the importance of finding a job to her. She even stated that her fiancé delayed application for her to move until he secured a job for her. In her own words, R1 said -

“My brother, why should I worry about job? My fiancé knew that I had a very good job back home and so it took him a long time to file my papers. He knows very well that I need it because I’m the one taking care of my younger ones. I was well assured that he has taken care of the job issue before I agreed to move”

By this revelation, it is obvious she was not much concerned about accessing available opportunities upon arrival, given that her fiancé already took responsibility for it.

The most interesting of the respondents is R3, the immigrant that moved here to work. Based on his story, his calm response to the issue of finding a job upon arrival stems from the fact that he already has a job offer confirmed by the embassy before he was issued a work permit to Sweden. According to R3 –

“I wasn’t worried about job because I already have one. Guy you won’t believe me. My first visa ever was a two years’ work permit I got through a small Swedish company”

According to his story, the issue of job is already a reality, and the responsibility for securing the job lied on the company he was to work with upon arrival in Sweden.

5.1.2. RESPONSIBILITY RESTS ON INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY

Unlike the respondents mentioned above, the interviewees that arrived as students on the other hand, had very high positive anticipation of their job opportunity in Sweden according to their stories. The story by one of the interviewees clearly captured the perception of the others. As one interviewee R4, expressed it -

“but trust me, I have already contacted my guys over there and they said the ground is level, that there is enough fish in the ocean for everybody...as long as you are not lazy you can always recoup whatever you spent within a short period because there are enough jobs”

He based his expectations on the stories from his acquaintances living in Sweden as well as their demeanor friends whenever they return from Europe by saying –

“...you know how they behave when they come back who will not believe what they say”

In Africa, returnees from abroad oftentimes tell one-sided stories in order to sometimes conceal the through situation of events. As a result a lot of admirers usually buy into their stories and make serious decisions without further investigation.

While the expectations of the refugees and respondents that arrived for family reunion were driven mainly by the information and assurance of the government and partners (their hosts) for their employability expectations, the other respondents (students and worker) relied on their education, skills and work experiences. Respondent R3 said he has done all sort of jobs from cleaning to driving. He even stated that he was recommended to his employer in Sweden by one of his friends, as a result of his knowledge of his versatility. Despite the students' high optimism about their chances of securing a job upon arrival, they were completely oblivious of the kind of jobs at their disposal and how to access the job market. However, their optimism was not dampened, given that they are highly qualified with professional working experiences.

5.2. STORIES OF EXPOSURE TO THE REALITIES OF THE LABOUR MARKET

The theme *exposure to the realities of the labour market* describes the respondents stories about how they identified themselves in time, space and context based on their actual experiences of the reality of the Swedish labour market. And in order to make sense of their employability at this stage, the respondents needed to reflect on the sequence of events that took place upon arrival in Sweden. These events included initial experiences such as reception upon arrival; settling down and accessing the labour market. The purpose was to ascertain how their actual experience matched with the over hyped expectations they had before moving to Sweden. This knowledge will enable the individuals to identify who they are in their new environment and what that means in entering the job market.

In contrast to the theme of expectation, the exposure theme was marked by stories of initial fulfilment for some and initial disappointment for others. The respondents had diverse experiences upon arrival in Sweden from their reception upon arrival, settling down as well as entering the job market. The chaotic experiences stems from the fact that there initial experiences gives way to a slightly different experience at every given time. Moreso, the initial experiences of the individual respondents differed and was greatly determined by their characteristics as

outlined in table1, especially their reason for moving to Sweden. This particular characteristic defined the status of the individual respondents and informs the actions to be taken at every given situation.

5.2.1. SMOOTH INITIAL EXPERIENCE UPON ARRIVAL IN SWEDEN

The respondents that came to Sweden as refugees had a very smooth initial experience and their expectation matched with the reality going by their stories. They recounted for example that as soon the plane landed there were people already waiting to welcome and convey them to pre-arranged accommodation. According to R8;

“as soon our plane landed, I checked out and there was people and vehicles waiting to pick me up together with the other refugees that travelled in the same flight”

He stated that they had no difficulties with accommodation and food, however there was not a discussion about job for a while, since they wanted them to get settled-in first. The respondent narrated further that every responsibility ranging from registration, orientation and language studies was handled by the government. The most important of all he said was that the government also took responsibility for his skills training as well as finding him a job.

Just like R8, Respondent R11 stated that:

“after registration we opened account, after a while we started orientation and language school. In short the experience was good like the stories we used to hear back home”

The respondents that moved in to reunite with their families had initial experiences similar to the refugees. Their experiences are captured by the story of respondent R1, who said:

“My fiancé was waiting for me at the airport when I arrived.... he came with his car and we went straight home”

The stories above resonate from the same respondents that initially placed the responsibility of getting them a job to others. Given that they had very reliable social network, there was concrete

pre-arrangement before they arrived in Sweden. Hence, they all had stress-free receptions upon arrival. The importance of experiences like these is to show the level of ease these individuals were exposed to immediately they arrived in Sweden.

5.2.2. DIFFICULT EXPERIENCE UPON ARRIVAL IN SWEDEN

The stories from respondents that arrived as students shows that the overtly optimism that characterized their expectation started with a difficult experience immediately they arrived. Having no reliable social networks, they had no concrete arrangement for reception and accommodation upon arrival. According to Respondent R2, the problems were enormous and started right from the airport as they had no one to pick them up at the airport. Respondent R2 summed it up by saying:

“my guy you are on your own as soon as you enter Europe....you just have to find your way....I didn't know anybody in Sweden all I needed to do was to ask question... you know how we say it back homeone who asks questions never miss their way”.

Another respondent R6 narrated that his friend refused to show up at the airport to receive him. In his own words, respondent R6 lamented:

“my friend refused to come pick me up when I arrived, because he didn't want me to know where he lives. I had to perambulate the whole town looking to find people I could explain my situation to, till someone directed me to the central station.....there I found some good people that helped me”

Going by the stories of R2 and R6, they devised a self-help initiative in order to get out of their initial quagmire, by communicating their needs to others.

The issue of accommodation was more troubling to the respondents that arrived as students, given that universities in Sweden do not arrange housing for new intakes. Respondent R5 captured this experience by stating that -

“...do you believe that the school did not help matters..... I thought it was the same as other countries where school arranges accommodation for new intakes, but no.... could you imagine

telling me that sorry they don't do such, that I was supposed to apply for housing online before coming”.

While in the words of respondent R6 -

“ I finally settled with two other guys in a student room.....but the rent was considerably high....by comparison, one month rent here will get me a room for one year back home, you can understand what I'm talking about”

Their experience about accommodation could also be linked to their lack of social network as well as improper planning before moving to a new environment. However, it will be unfair to put the blame squarely on them on that issue, given that the problem of accommodation is well rooted in the Swedish society (especially in the big cities). Even when there is availability, the means of accessing them leaves much to ponder. The process of renting an apartment in Sweden involves a rigorous process of online application that places you in a queue. This invariably means that your opportunity of getting an offer depends on your position in the queue, and this could sometimes mean waiting for several years just to rent an apartment.

5.2.3. ACCESSING THE LABOUR MARKET

The respondents' social contacts became useful as their experiences took different turns when they tried to secure a job. There was a dramatic change for the better especially among the students (though not at the same time), as they were able to get something to do as a result of their interaction with other students. Respondent R6 said:

“My roommate referred me to his company as a replacement for two weeks when going on holidays, and I was offered a contract afterwards and retained by the company”.

Three other respondents that arrived as students had similar experiences, as they all worked unofficially for some time to gain experience before they were introduced to the companies when there was either the need for new workers or when going on holidays. However, the job was not difficult but it is only done at night, and given that they arrived as students, losing night sleep have a negative effect on their studies. R2 noted that he was accustomed to waking up at night to read till early morning, but with this job he needed re-adjustment.

R2 said -

“the work is easy but you need to prepare yourself psychologically because the work is done at night everyday...so I had to initially work with a friend for about two months to prepare myself before he introduced me to the company”.

According to R4 & 5, they were tutored by the same person initially, since they took the same course at the university and also both of them shared the same apartment when they arrived newly. They had to work with a person with experience, to make it easier when they get introduced to the company. However, they secured jobs at different companies about one year apart. Respondent R4 said,

“my school friend referred me to the company when he was going on holiday and I was accepted and given few days of training.....after the holiday you have to indicate whether to continue working or not.....who will refuse such an offer...I have sent applications to plenty companies for better job directly but no success, so I have to make do with what is available”.

While R5 said:

“I waited for close to one year before securing a job. I made a request to everyone I came across to call me whenever there is an opening in their work place.....sometimes I get opportunity for a few days, sometimes for some weeks....but during the summer one of the companies I worked short time with called me to replace someone that was leaving.....that was how I got a job and I experienced a different life afterwards.....at least I didn't have to worry about my bills anymore”

For the respondents that came for family reunion and work, there was not any immediate change to their situation as they quickly settled in and started working almost immediately. Respondent R14, stated that her fiancé owns a private company and with the connection he had with various companies (previous employers), he was able to get more cleaning contracts which they both managed with two of their employees. While according to respondent R2:

“you know when I moved I was very versatile, as I started to work immediately. My boss was very impressed because I can handle jobs independently..... he sends me to other cities to do a job alone, and early in the morning I will drive sometimes five hours to get there”

As for the respondents that came as refugees, they were in despair as change came psychologically rather than physically due to their individual history. Accessing the labour market for them took a longer time, given that they have to stick with the training programme routine until they could be matched with available jobs. They are expected to show readiness to learn and follow through with their selected vocational training, in order to get off social benefits. According to them, while they studied language, they had access to social benefits, but according to them it came with unexplainable nuances, body languages and unspoken words, which become clearer as time went by. Though the system is generous with social benefits, at the same time it encourages people to work, and so when you are not making much progress in language and skills training, you are frowned upon. According to respondent R7 -

“as you discuss with other refugees, you get a better understanding of how you are spoken about and looked upon. You have to sign attendance forms each day you attend class, and whenever you miss, you are likely to get a deduction from your benefit”.

Respondent R12, states that they are forced to think about getting a job quickly as they think about all the humiliation they get from the Swedes and other immigrants. There are some refugees that choose to get by on social support rather than make effort to secure employment, and as a result it is common to hear all refugees referred to as lazy as well as other derogatory names. According to R12:

“It’s true we are here as refugees but we have feelings too. I know some people have been collecting social benefits for a long time and don’t want to work. That is not everybody...I wanted to work, when I started making my own money from work, then I felt confident. Now I have my dignity back”

However, those of them with social contacts are allowed to leave the programme at any point in time, if they manage to secure employment. According to R9,

“those that have relatives or countrymen with private firms are luckier, they joined them immediately they learn the language and start working, but those of us that do not have, were expected to follow the whole SFI programme and Pratik before we can work, and sometimes it takes a long time”.

According to R11, most times they blame the problem of others on all the refugees. R11 said:

“I don’t want to be told that I give birth to so many children.... It hurts when they tell you that, because I only have two and that is enough for me..... just because some people have many children they tell that to everybody.... the most painful part is that they don’t talk to you directly. They will be discussing loud so that you will hear what they are saying”.

The above statement captures the common negative comments directed towards refugees that resonates. It is widely believed (albeit erroneously sometimes), that the more children people have the more social benefits they receive, and the less likely for them to work since they will be occupied with looking after so many children. Hence the negative reaction they receive from others.

Going by the respondents stories, it could be deduced that the respondents’ reason for moving to Sweden and their social networks has a very profound impact on how they experienced the realities of the labour market upon arrival in Sweden. For example, how the different respondents accessed the job market differed. While the respondents that moved to Sweden to pursue education relied on self-effort by interacting with fellow students, the others relied on their companies, family members and government support. Moreover, the stories about reception and accommodation reveals the level of ease and difficulty they were faced upon arrival in Sweden. This particular section of their stories gives an insight into the initial struggle the respondents were exposed to upon arrival, in the course of negotiating their ways through the rigours of the Swedish labour market.

5.3. STORIES OF ADJUSTMENT TO THE REALITIES OF THE LABOUR MARKET

Stories of adjustment to the realities of the labour market involved the several discussions about the participants’ processes of coping, as they became aware of the realities of the labour market. These processes involved stories of the various efforts they made such as redefinition of identity, refocusing of priorities, self-censorship and other efforts needed to fit into the available job

opportunities. The respondents faced their adjustments differently. While those with refugee status and permanent resident permit had a smooth ride, since they were entitled to benefits as well as CSN, the others had a tougher time given that they have to either totally depend on themselves till they complete their programmes or receive permanent resident permit or both.

To make sense of the reality of the job market and adapt to it, all the respondents had to individually take steps to enhance their chances of obtaining the available jobs. Fulltime language studies were a first step towards going into the skills training programme. For the respondents that came as refugees, it was a natural process, given that they have to move from one stage of the training to another. But the realities for other respondents differed, according to their stories.

5.3.1. CLIMBING DOWN THE LADDER

In the case of the other participants, the process was different. They all had to go back to the starting point (from where the refugees started when they arrived), in order to adjust to their changing situations. As a result of the uncertainty of the labour market, most of the respondents had to be retrained in other skills where there is availability of jobs. According to respondent (R1), who moved here to reunite with her fiancé, having the support of a close relative was crucial to her ability to cope. She described how she needed to go back and register for the language course to enable her obtain another job, after her husband stopped receiving cleaning contracts from the larger firms. She noted that with the language course she was able to proceed to retrain as a chef. Although she was not convinced initially, she was encouraged by her fiancé. According to her,

“Initially I was worried, though I love cooking and cleaning and serving, but I do it at home for myself and my husband, I never do it as a job. But my husband encouraged me to continue, because that is one of the only areas that never lack workers. People eat every day you know, so there is always a job for me. I would have loved to open an African restaurant, but my brother how many of us are here? Who will patronize me?” (R1).

Respondent R4 seems to be in a dilemma as he still hoped that someday he will secure a job in his field. He narrated how he had to resort to handing out his CVs directly to different companies around the city, given that he did not get any call for interview for the numerous times he applied for jobs online. He had to settle for the available opportunity in the blue-collar sector, and work towards making something out of it. According to him -

“I went to full time SFI, now I can speak the Swedish language very well... I am still waiting to get a job in my field someday. But I am not even sure of myself anymore. I have worked here for long and I had a good position as a manager. Though not in the top management, I am responsible for the management and maintenance of up to 500 apartments with different workers under me”.

In this way he showed a sign of dissatisfaction as a blue-collar worker due to downward mobility, despite rising to the position of a manager.

According to the respondent R3 who came here for work, he was invited to Sweden by small a firm where he worked for some time. The firm had a problem with the tax authorities because they did not declare all their taxes. While trying to get another job, he discovered he needed to learn the Swedish language first, which he completed successfully. Given that he chose to be retrained in the same job he did earlier, he was offered employment in the middle of his training programme by a larger firm. As a result he did not have to go back to complete the programme, because he show competence during his internship as a result of previous hands-on experience.

Unlike R3, respondent R6 stated that, after her language training, she opted for the care-giver programme, where she was retrained as an assistance nursing were she blended very easily. She noted that her retraining was easy, given that she already had a degree in social work. According to her,

“I just finished my final exam and waiting for my posting It will be a dream come true to work with people in need. I would have done that earlier but I thought I would get a job as a social worker somewhere else”.

Going by the respondents' stories, adapting to the reality also demanded more than learning physical skills. R6 noted that because of the low skilled jobs they do, it is common to be working

under a manager far less qualified academically. However every employee is expected to be loyal to them and take orders and queries from them. He continued by stating that even the members of his team are in that same category, as a result you have to come down to their level in order to work as a team since the result of your work will be judged as a team and not individually.

5.3.2. RESOURCES AND COMPETENCY UPDATE

Four participants in the study sample narrated how they needed to re-learn how to ride a bicycle as well as acquiring vehicle licenses. R2, who came here for education, noted how he was ashamed when he discovered the importance of riding a bicycle. He narrated that the last time he rode a bicycle was when he was a kid and only when they visited the village during the holidays since they lived permanently in the city. The reason he gave for not being able to perfect the use of bicycle in the city was because their cities are not bicycle friendly. As a result he had to perfect the use of bicycle in order to retain his job. However, that adjustment did not come without pain as he noted that he had accidents on three different occasions and one of them was very serious. He also stated that he had to obtain his vehicle drivers permit as a job requirement. And according to him –

“I can drive a car, but before I could get my license I spent a lot of money that would have bought me a very nice car back home”.

Just like R2, R3, noted that the worst thing that happened to him was, while working with the previous firm, his permission to use his home driving license expired after the first year, as he worked with the small firm. Given that the company refused to support him financially to offset the exorbitant cost, he had to spend almost all his salary for a few months to acquire a Swedish driving license. While R2 and R3 narrated that they spent a lot of money to obtain their driving license, R5 and R4 on the other hand had different experiences, as they spent less with help of the government. According to respondent R5 who also came to Sweden for education,

“my brother I have studied everything in this world. I have university degrees but I can’t drive a car can you imagine that”.

In his story, he showed a burning desire to acquire driving skills. He further narrated that when he finished the language programme, he opted to be trained as a building and construction technician. The training according to him went successfully, until one day they were informed that they must have driving licenses for car and truck in order to work. Fortunately for him, the school organized a driving course (subsidized by the government) for those of them that do not have driving licenses. And that gave him the opportunity to learn to drive, secure his license and eventually got a job automatically. In his story, he had to undergo retraining despite his university degrees in order to secure a job. According to respondent (R4), driving license was cheap and easy for him to obtain since he already got his resident permit and was already able to drive.

5.3.3. SELF-CENSORSHIP

Adjusting to the realities of the labour market required a level of self-censorship, in order to fit into available job opportunities. Respondent R9 narrated how he needed to put the issue of religious and cultural principles aside in order to stay on the job. According to him,

“we have to work together to deliver good service to our customers. As a Muslim we only eat halal meat but here at work sometimes we get most orders for non halal meat. And as a manager I have to accept it in order to keep my job.....some of our senior managers are MuslimsI have to put religion aside that is why I rose to become a manager here”.

Halal meat is the same meat one could get from regular shops, however those sold (to Muslims) in the small corner shops around the city need to follow laid down Islamic principles during the killing and processing of the animal. Moreso, pork meat is not consumed by Muslims for religious reasons. He noted that he needed to keep his job for the sake of dignity, independence and further opportunities. He claims to be against relying on social benefit when he can work and contribute to the system. He also showed his dislike for reliance on social welfare, which according to him has been branded a popular culture among some refugees population in Sweden.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study has built on the tenets of the sensemaking concept to uncover how African immigrants make sense of their employability in the blue-collar sector of the Swedish labour market, by revealing how they negotiate their ways in the face of the numerous barriers they have to overcome in order to access available opportunities. The findings could be summarized as series of stories imbued with perception of employability, based on their expectations of, exposure to and adjustment to the Swedish labour market. The research question - ‘How do African immigrant blue-collar workers make sense of their employability?’ will be answered by uncovering how they negotiated their ways in the labour market at different junctures using Weick’s, (1995), sense making concept, as well as the studies of employability and other associated concepts.

The analysis of the results of the respondents’ interviews shows the importance of belief and action in how the African immigrants make sense of their employability (Weick, 1995: 135). However, in the opinion of Weick, (1995: 133), sensemaking could utilize either belief or action as a starting point. The African immigrants in this study started their sensemaking process by believing the stories of institutional support and abundance of job opportunities. This belief gave rise to lofty expectations that resulted in goal setting (the making of self-fulfilling prophecies), which required various actions in order to realize their expectations (Weick, 1995: 134).

6.1. MAKING SENSE BY BELIEVING

It could be deduced from the analysis that the participants have been exposed to reoccurring stories reflecting (among other things) abundance of jobs, government incentives, promises from family members and positive economic forecasts by inter-governmental organizations. By taking a narrow cue of positive future expectations, the respondents made sense of their employability through memory and belief in the stories they heard. In sensemaking, reliance on memories and beliefs has been shown to be highly dependent on how it evokes the emotions of individuals (Weick, 1995: 45). Moreso, given the respondents belief in these stories, acting upon them has

been described as quite normal, given that good stories has the power to glue together contrasting portions of events, which as a result stimulates and steers plausible actions that makes retrospective sense of situations, in the quest for realizing expectations (Weick, 1995: 61).

The weight of the respondents belief coupled with their individual characteristics determined the line of action the respondents needed to take to enact their belief. A very important discovery of the analysis is the close linkage between the immigrants' individual characteristics and the level of action they needed to take in order to realize their expectations. Going by the analysis of the interviews for example, it could be said that the respondents' that moved to Sweden as students had to struggled more in accessing the labour market when compared to the others, and as a result needed more action in order to make themselves employable.

Belief in itself is vital to the respondents' focus on the future, as it enables them to make self-fulfilling prophesies, which serves as a deliberate tool to initiate necessary actions that could give substance to their belief of abundant job opportunities (Weick, 1995: 145). Merton, (1948), (mentioned earlier) described self-fulfilling prophesies as an initial false definition of a situation, which evokes novel actions that could make the original false definition become a reality. In the opinion of Merton, (1948), this manner of specious validation of self-fulfilling prophesies, perpetuates a reign of error. The opinion expressed above by Merton, (1948), suggests three things, firstly that there are no job opportunities in Sweden as believed by the African immigrants, secondly there does not exist institutional and family support, and finally individual efforts geared towards accessing the available job opportunities are also false. To counter that notion, Weick, (1995: 147), believes that the view expressed by Merton, (1948), above appears one-sided as it regards original prophesy as having just one meaning of initial false definition, which contradicts the general understanding of prophesies as 'unfinished business' capable of having either true or false readings. There are questions of whose opinion it is to declare a self-fulfilling prophesy as beginning with a false definition, and in relation to what goals was such a declaration meant? Sensemaking assumes that individuals' prophesies are not based on the expectations of total accuracy, but only needs to be credible, believable, interesting and emotionally appealing (Weick, 1995: 62). As a result, in order to predict their employability the information relied upon by the African immigrants in question, need not to be accurate, but

plausible enough to stimulate them to set prophecies and act with great energy that could give rise to future reasonable outcome (Weick, 1983).

Self-fulfilling prophecies (or sometimes used in this study as anticipations, expectations or prophecies) has been highlighted as a very essential function of sensemaking, and serves as the point of departure in the sensemaking process (Weick, 1995: 148). The individuals in this study did not have much to start with in their effort to make sense of their employability in Sweden, except for the various stories they have heard, as a result, their belief stands as the starting point of their active prodding in an effort to give substance to their prophecies. There is the assumption that individuals' sensemaking and expectations often occur side by side, and in that regards there is nothing unassuming that the respondents in this study make sense of their employability in Sweden with inflated expectations of job opportunities. However, Weick, (1995: 190), warns that

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"...expectations tends to build up casually on the basis of a sprawling mixture of myth, peer pressure, accidents, stereotypes, hearsay, avoided tests, fiction, vividness, and wishful thinking"
(Weick, 1995: 190).

The above mentioned sources of expectations entails the need for individuals to set goals with caution, given that while expectations never changes, what individuals do with the results changes. Weick, (1995: 190), notes that sensemaking relates much to plausibility as much as it does for accuracy, and warns that too much belief and confident in one's expectations could lead to blessing as well as to curse when events changes.

The analysis of the stories of the African immigrants in this study reveals that they paid little attention to the warning about expectations. Based on their self-fulfilling prophecies, it could be concluded that they were selective in what they perceived, by seeing only what they expected of their realities and paying selective attention to every other thing that does not tally with their expectations. The reaction of the respondents to the changes that they experienced at every juncture is a testimony to the above assumption, given that they had overhyped expectations by believing so much in the accuracy of the stories they heard. The immigrants that moved in as refugees for example never envisaged how difficult it would be to transition from living on institutional support to training to get a job. The same could be said of the other respondents in their quest to readjust to realities of the labour market. The respondents that moved in to reunite

with families did not think about the vulnerability of their family members, as a result they never took losing their jobs into consideration. Those that arrived as students never bothered to find out the kind of available job opportunities, as well as figure out how to make the available opportunities accessible to them upon arrival. As immigrants with higher academic qualifications, they had probably hoped for opportunities in their academic fields, however, they forgot to get details of the do's and don'ts of approaching the labour market through the human resources sector (private recruitment firms). Though some of the respondents stated that they applied several times for jobs in their field (high skilled sector) before opting for blue-collar jobs, it would have however been less stressful for them to adjust to the less skilled sector if they had better information about the difficulty accessing the white-collar jobs.

Despite not heeding the dangers of lofty expectations, the respondents however adjusted their expectations as realities unfolded, with the realization that they were engaged in an 'ongoing project' which battles for relevance with other events happening around them and thereby liable for changes at every stage (Weick, 1995: 43). The respondents realized the need to deepen their human capital, which Hillage and Pollard, (1998), describes as an individual's 'employability assets' which includes their knowledge, skills and attitudes.

They engaged in new behaviours which according to Weick, (1995: 147), can act as a changing event that can either alter existing self-fulfilling prophecies or disqualify the original prophecy. The respondents had to come to terms with the unfolding events, and act differently at every situation in order to adjust to new realities. The refugees had to decode the true meaning of every treatment they receive and every nuanced speech they hear in order to strive to get a job in lieu of living on social benefits. In order to realize their belief in abundance of job opportunities, the immigrants that arrived as students also had to come to terms with fact that getting a job equal to their academic qualifications is highly impossible, and in the process they reappraised their expectations and focused on broadening their human capital in order to fit into available blue-collar jobs. According to Becker, (2009), having formal school qualifications are not enough, (as it appears irrelevant in the situation they found themselves), as a result they needed also to get new skills and on-the-job-training in order to adjust and fit into available opportunities based on the realities of labour market. This response of theirs supports the opinion that expectation has

the ability to self-correct in the sensemaking processes of joint adjustment, as a result individuals are advised to adjust both their expectations and those events that appears to diverge from their expectations whenever the opportunity arises, in order to achieve better realization of their prophesies (Jussim, 1991; Rothbaum, Weiss and Snyder, 1992).

6.2. MAKING SENSE BY TAKING ACTION

Previous research by Garsten et al, (2004), has shown that the ability of individuals to meet the changing demands of the labour market depends on the combination of actions (in form of work, competence and learning), which they take in order to enhance their employability. To make sense of their employability in the Swedish labour market, the respondents has to be reminded that sensemaking is associated with elements of ‘surprise, contrast, and change’ at every given juncture, especially to new arrivals (Louis, 1980). And this opinion resonated with their individual experiences which for some could be described as tumultuous, and for others a bit dramatic at different junctures. Due to this uncertainty, they needed to take various actions in order to realize their expectations of the Swedish labour market. The respondents’ capabilities for action gave them the leverage to make sense of what to accept, reject or do something about in whatever situations they find themselves in order to fulfil their prophesies (Wieck, 1995: 145). Furthermore, the respondents needed also to accept the fact that in sensemaking, action matters as a much as belief, given that both factors are interrelated. The analysis shows that the respondents believed so much in their prophesies, but were somehow ill-prepared for the turn of events. However, they took plausible actions in order to adjust to unfolding events. Given that the respondents’ situations were influenced by their prior inflated expectations, there was an inherent need to enact an environment that conforms to the realities of the labour market (Weick, 1995: 30). The lofty expectations of the respondents that arrived as students for example were centered on their previous educational qualifications. However, previous research by Becker, (2009), shows that organizations need workers with practical skills (evidenced by an employee’s work experience, ability to function in a group and ability to please customers), rather than academic credentials that merely informs about an individual’s valuable traits (such as potential, abilities, persistence). By taking various actions, the respondents were able to reduce their

experienced discomfort and minimize the effect of unrealized predictions (Steel, 1988). When faced with the realities of the market upon arrival in Sweden (for example), some of the students contemplated going back home at the initial stage, the refugees felt humiliated by the way they were been pushed to acquire skills, while some other respondents found themselves in dilemma when their initial employment ceased. But by taking various actions, they were able to take the bull by the horns and stabilize their situations.

6.2.1. COMMITMENT TO ACTIONS

The possibility of getting results from their chosen actions required the respondents to be committed to whatever actions they took, in order to realize their expectations (Weick, 1995: 157). Commitment binds together previously unorganized perceptions derived from past experiences, into something orderly as a result of committed action. Commitment in sensemaking also leads to better focus, uncovers new possibilities, and imposes a form of logic to the interpretation and justification of the actions being taken (Weick, 1995: 159). With commitment, they were able to negotiate their ways in the Swedish labour market, by continuous redefinition of self during the process of social interactions, at different situations and with different others. This process of identity redefinition enabled them to appear efficacious, competent and also achieve self enhancement through the maintenance of positive and affective state of self (Weick, 1995: 20). It is commitment to actions that has driven the respondents to re-appraise their priorities and endure in their struggle to access the labour market without institutional and family support (especially the students), undergo self-censorship, as well as climb down the ladder to fit into available job opportunities in the blue collar sector.

As pointed out earlier, organizations have moved away from the traditional employment relations that require them to bear the burden of providing jobs as well as ensure the security of such jobs through life-long employment contracts (Berntson, Sverke and Marklund, 2006). This trend has given way to the era of shared responsibilities among the labour market actors, and as a result the respondents needed to be committed to their actions as a way of keeping to their side of the bargain in this new employment relations. This commitment is needed to enable

organizations achieve flexibility in order to survive and stay competitive in the global market (Garsten, et al, 2004).

The respondents' commitment is centered on the need to justify the various actions they have taken to realize their anticipations. The immigrants in this study made a choice of working in the blue collar sector after scanning the environment and paying attention to the events happening around them, uncovering previously unnoticed features and appreciate their situations better. Those that came as students realized how difficult it will be getting employed as university graduates after sending out multitudes of job applications without response. Having realized that brandishing their academic credentials will get them no positive results, they resorted to setting alternative goals and take committed actions (in form of various skills acquisition) towards making themselves employable in the low skilled sector in order to survive. They took advantage of the Swedish labour market training program (Arbetsmarknadsutbildning), administered by the public employment agency (Arbetsformedlingen), to acquire new skills to give themselves a brighter chance of fitting into available job opportunities in the labour market (Kvist, 2012). The respondents that arrived as refugees on the other hand recognized the need to take action to make selves employable, upon the realization that they are not spoken of in a positive manner due to their reliance on social benefits. Committing themselves to their actions was a way to justify their choices and realize their altered expectations. With commitment, the respondents become tied to their actions, and through these actions it ties them to their belief that sustains their involvement in the action (Salancik, 1977).

6.2.2. RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACTIONS

Being bound by actions consequently means taking responsibility for such actions and sometimes its consequences. Actions need to be responsible in order to conform to the requirements of employers. According to Becker, (2009), given that the needs of employers goes beyond 'credentialism' (which is a set of information that merely shows an person's valuable traits such as potential, abilities, persistence), individuals also need other attributes like ability to function in a group, discipline, honesty and trust in order to be given responsible tasks.

In order for the respondents to meet employers requirement for responsible actions, Weick, (1995: 158), contends that their actions must be done in public, be irrevocable and done with volition. To expatiate on that line of thinking, the respondents showed commitment by doing something that everyone sees. This in essence means that, given that the respondents are engaged in the blue-collar sector, their tasks involved social and physical interactions, and they have to be responsible for the results of their work, given that they are open for scrutiny by both their employers and their fellow employees. By engaging in open interactions, the respondents were responsible for paying attention to the activities of others in similar situations, as a result take a cue from their observations and redirect their own activities to better suit their situations (Blummer, 1969).

In order to make sense of their employability, the respondents were able to show their responsibility by choosing actions that are irrevocable. This invariably means that they have to utilize their resources (time, funds, and skills) to make a choice (in the midst of competing needs) to concentrate on a particular skill area, and individually take advantage of the available training opportunities to acquire competencies in that chosen area, in order to access available opportunities (Garsten, et al, 2004). Some of the respondents made the decision of spending their savings to secure driving licenses, while others had to endure accidents and injuries in order to learn to acquire bicycle skills in order to save their jobs.

Furthermore, the respondents have to be responsible for their actions due to the high stakes and low tolerance of mistakes attached to their jobs, given that employers oftentimes demand commitment from their employees by placing these conditions as a pre-condition for hiring. These requirements includes the embodiment of defined values and attitudes (such as initiative, flexibility, availability, trust and loyalty) as well as the ability to adapt to employers changing needs (Berntson, Sverke and Marklund, 2006; De Vos, De Hauw and Van der Heijden, 2011). This in reality means that some of the respondents have to prove their loyalty by taking orders from other employees with higher authority (despite the respondents being of higher academic standing than those), while others needed to hamper their strict religious and cultural beliefs in order to adapt to the realities of the labour market.

7. CONCLUSION

African Immigrants are an integral part of the Swedish society and those working in the blue collar sector could rightly be classified as actors in the Swedish labour market. They contribute their quotas (in form of working and paying taxes) to the Swedish economy based on the opportunities available to them.

This research is designed to capture how a group of African immigrants in the blue-collar sector of the Swedish labour market makes sense of their employability, by uncovering how they negotiate their ways in the labour market considering the numerous barriers encountered at different situations and junctures. By reviewing relevant literatures on the study of employability (and related concepts such as human capital and credentialism), as well as utilizing the sensemaking theory by Weick, (1995), this study finds that the immigrants in this study make sense of their employability through belief and action-taking.

In making sense of their employability, the respondents relied on their belief in the various stories and information they have amassed over time about the generous institutional support and abundant job opportunities in the Swedish labour market. This belief encouraged the respondents to have lofty expectations, which thereby prodded them to make self-fulfilling prophecies and set convincing goals. The respondents intended to realize their high expectations by accessing the available opportunities through various means depending on their individual characteristics (most importantly their reason for moving to Sweden). The findings revealed that the respondents that moved in as refugees believed in the availability of institutional support in accessing the labour market, the respondents that arrived for family re-union believed in the support of family members, while the respondents that came to Sweden as students believed in their individual effort in accessing the available opportunities in the labour market.

In order to make sense of their employability, the respondents needed to realize their expectations by negotiating the labour market through taking responsive actions at different junctures and situations. Garsten et al, (2004), opine that individuals require combination of actions (in form of work, competence and learning), in order to enhance their employability and meet the changing demands of the labour market. These various actions however require high

level of commitment and responsibility. The African immigrants in this study engaged in (among other actions) social interactions, skills acquisitions, priority reappraisals and self-censorship to enhance their employability and fit into available opportunities.

The impact of the thresholds highlighted by Kvist, (2012) (human capital re-evaluation, discrimination and lack of network), on how the respondents made sense of their employability is minimal. The issue of their human capital re-evaluation did not impact the ability of the immigrants to secure jobs in the blue-collar sector, due to the fact that the higher education qualifications held by the respondents that arrived as students were irrelevant in the low-skilled jobs they are engaged in. In addition, the low/non formal academic qualification of the other respondents, did not hinder their skills training and subsequent employment, given that the Swedish labour market access programme was designed to cater for all immigrants irrespective of their previous level of academic qualifications (Kvist, 2012).

The need for developing networks was much meaningful to the respondents that moved to Sweden to study, as it helped them navigate their situations away from despair when it seemed they have lost all hope, while to the other respondents, it mattered less because they already had reliable contacts before coming to Sweden.

Finally, the issue of discrimination did not appear to play a part on how the respondents made sense of their employability. It should be noted that each of the respondents were able to secure a job upon the completion of the labour market training programme, irrespective of their situations. It is also important to point out that the labour market access training programs is a integrative policy by the government designed to train/re-train all legal immigrants (without any exception), in order to enhance their employability.

On the whole, irrespective of the roles played by the other labour market actors (government and organizations), the responsibility for breaking the barriers of entry into the blue-collar sector of the Swedish labour market lies squarely with the individual (Garsten, et al, 2004). As pointed out earlier, the Swedish government sponsored labour market access training is an all-inclusive program that caters for the needs of all prospective job-seekers in order to meet the requirements of various companies, and the program encompasses language training, skills acquisition and internships, as well as network building (Kvist, 2012). In addition, there is an existing

collaboration between the government and various employers, and in some cases, the government offers incentives in the form of taking care of a larger share of new employee's salaries, as a way of encouraging various companies to open their doors to new workers (Kvist, 2012). All that is required is the commitment of the individual in following through with the program in order to enhance their employability and fit into available jobs upon completion.

7.1. RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

The study has contributed by revealing the situation of African immigrant blue-collar employees in Sweden, by identifying the barriers hindering them from accessing the labour market and uncovering how they cope with the situations in the face of limited opportunities available to them. The need to study these set of immigrants separately arises from the assumption that the privileges enjoyed by immigrants in Sweden are dependent on the ties that exist between Sweden and the immigrant's country of origin. As an example, the privileges accorded to immigrants from other Scandinavian countries differ from those of immigrants from other European union, other European countries, other continents and so on and so forth. These privileges determine the margin of opportunities available to them.

In addition, this study has contributed by looking into the employability discuss through the lens of blue-collar employment, rather than the ubiquitous research focus on university graduates seeking white-collar jobs, as could be found in most academic literatures.

Finally, this research also contributes to the employability discourse by revealing that contrary to the emphasis on educational measures often referred to in policies and previous research, the African immigrants in this study strongly emphasizes (in addition) the importance of social networks and individual resilience in how they make sense of employability.

7.2. FURTHER RESEARCH

The implication of this study for further research about African immigrants' employability in Sweden is the uncovering of how the outlined characteristics of the respondents affect their access upon arrival. The reason for moving to Sweden (for example) determines the immigration status of the individual upon arrival, and affects the extent of struggle needed to adjust to changing situations. These characteristics also show the degree of difficulty an individual endures in order to access available opportunities. Further research should focus on ways to minimize the difficulties faced by immigrants in accessing the labour market irrespective of their individual characteristics. Finally, given that this study focused on a handful of African immigrants in the city of Gothenburg, further studies could be extended to a larger size of the African immigrant population in other geographical areas in Sweden, for example carrying out comparative analysis to ascertain how these immigrants in different Swedish regions make sense of their employability where they live.

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Interview guide

1. Could you kindly give a brief introduction of yourself (name, age, sex, education, occupation and country of origin)?
2. Why did you decide to move to Sweden?
3. What was your occupation then?
4. Was it a salaried job or were you self-employed?
5. But at least you made a living somehow for yourself or were you totally dependent on family support?
6. What information did you have about Sweden before moving?
7. Did you have information about life and work in Sweden specifically or about Europe in general?
8. What impression did the information you had affect your choice of moving?
9. By the way did you have other choices or was Sweden just the only option?
10. Have you travelled to other parts of the world outside the African continent before moving to Sweden?
11. Can you describe what your expectations were when you finally had the opportunity to move?
12. What exactly gave you so much confidence that you will get a job immediately you arrive? What specific trainings, skills and work experiences do you have apart from your academic qualification?
13. Do your partner already arranged for a job before your arrival or does he/she have their own firms?
14. It must have really been celebration galore on the day you moved, or can you just describe the scenario on that eventful day?

NOW WE HAVE TO MOVE ON TO ARRIVAL IN SWEDEN

15. How was the reception upon your arrival at the airport?
16. Who came to pick you, just describe the sequence of events from your memory?
17. So what then happened after you have settled down?
18. Did you start looking for work immediately or where there specific procedures you had to follow?
19. Did you find a job based on your qualification?
20. How hard did you try given the skills and experiences you possessed?
21. How helpful were your previous education, skills and work experience in getting you a job?
22. How successful were you given all the effort you made?
23. So how can you describe your overall job hunting experience after arrival?
24. How did your experience affect your earlier optimism and could say your expectations were met?

Let us talk about how you reacted to your situation

25. Could you recount the steps you took to get to where you are right now?
26. I understand you are working right now, what specific procedures did you follow to get this job?
27. Are you satisfied with the job you are doing right now?
28. Given that new workers are brought in from time to time and old workers are let go, have you tried to find out why it is happening?
29. Do you think you have what it takes to keep your job?
30. What do you think is your unique selling point? I mean what is the attraction – why do you think you were selected by this employer in the midst of so many people that were introduced to the employer?
31. Can you describe the various tasks that are performed in your workplace by different workers?
32. Do the tasks change/vary seasonally
33. What steps are you taking to find a job that matches your qualification?
34. How well do you speak the Swedish language?
35. Tell me about your network
36. Are your family here in Sweden?
37. What kind of friends do you have?
38. Are they all people from your ethnicity/country/continent or are they different?
39. Where and how did you meet your friends?
40. What roles do you think your network of friends play in your ability to secure a job?
- 41.
42. your unique selling point? I mean what is the attraction – why do you think you were selected by this employer in the midst of so many people that were introduced to the employer?
43. Can you describe the various tasks that are performed in your workplace by different workers?
44. Do the tasks change/vary seasonally?
45. Does that mean you do different tasks at different periods?
46. How versatile are you? I mean are you able to work on different tasks in your job or are you only able to perform one particular task?
47. How does being able to do different tasks in your company enhance your opportunity to be employed or retained at a long run?
48. In the tasks you cannot do in your company, what are you doing to be able to acquire the necessary skills in order to perform those tasks?
49. Do you initiate the process of learning the skills to perform those tasks or do you wait for your employer to do that for you?
50. Do your employer organize trainings that enable you acquire new skills or share your competent knowledge with other co-workers?
51. What are the skills you have acquired since you arrived here?
52. Do you think those skills are responsible for the job you are doing right now?
53. Could you say that you are well adjusted to the Swedish system at the moment?
54. What is your general impression about your present situation?

