1. INTRODUCTION

My introduction chapter starts with a section about globalisation and continues with a discussion about problems that can arise and cause confusion in an intercultural communication situation. This follows by a section about values cherished by the Swedish and Australian cultures. Thereafter, the purpose of my thesis comes and then my thesis’ target group. The chapter finishes with a section about delimitations I have made in this thesis.

1.1 Globalisation - Sweden & Australia

People around the world are more connected to each other than ever before, and money and information flow more quickly than ever. Products and services produced in one part of the world are gradually becoming more and more available all across the globe. The main reason for this is the globalisation of companies and businesses. Sweden is one of the countries in which the trend towards increased globalisation has been strongest in the last few years. Sweden is one of the countries in which the trend towards increased globalisation has been strongest in the last few years. 

Australia is one of those countries that have become attractive to Swedes, and a lot of Swedes have chosen to immigrate to Australia because of a better labour market. Australia has a population of more than 21 million people and the surface area is not much smaller than that of the United States. The great majority of the people live on the east coast. Almost 25% of Australia’s population is born overseas with populations mainly from UK, Europe and Asia. Australia has a good reputation world wide for its friendly and relaxed people, great climate and beautiful beaches. Tourists across the world travel to the paradise 'down under' to see attractions such as the Opera House, Ayers Rock (Uluru) and the Great Barrier Reef.

Not just Swedish tourists find there way to Australia, so do Swedish companies and investors. The interest in setting up business in Australia has expanded more and more. In Australia, English is the spoken language, which the majority of the Swedish population is familiar with. This makes it easier for Swedish companies to set up business in Australia rather than in a non-spoken English country. The closeness to the growing Asian market is also a motivation factor and Swedish investors view Australia as a first step into the Asian market. Almost 1,000 Swedish companies are currently conducting business in Australia. Around 200 of these are Swedish subsidiaries and the rest are distributors or agents. The majority of the Swedish companies in Australia are doing very well.

4 http://www.witiger.com/internationalbusiness/globalization.htm
5 http://www.svensktmaringsliv.se/english/publications/article26281.ece
6 Interview; Lindholm
7 STC Australia Presentation June_07
8 STC Australia Presentation June_07
10 Interview; Lindholm
1.2 Problem Background

The globalisation is offering enormous business opportunities for Swedes in Australia, but at the same time it also presents challenges. One of the main challenges Swedes come across is culture differences. Employees with diverse background, language, norms and values are forced to communicate and work with each other, in order to conduct business. In a business situation like this a lot of things can go wrong.  

Each country has their own way of saying and doing things and what may not be offending to one person may be offending to another. In some countries a greeting should be simple and casual and in others they are more formal and structured. Some countries embrace the use of public space while others are protective of their private space. While it is common to start a business meeting with a general discussion of common interest in some countries, this is waist of time in others. Also the concept of time is treated differently across countries; some people arrive prior to time, some five minutes late and some anytime during the business meeting.

A cross-cultural business situation can be a minefield of diverse expectations. A lot of people are completely unaware of these differences and since most of them exist below the surface they can be difficult to discover in the initial meeting. People’s reflex is to interpret and understand local ways of communicating and acting through their own cultural references and they tend to think of their beliefs as ‘common sense’ and that ‘deep inside’ all people are the same - but they are not. In fact, it is the culture that in many ways controls and governs our unconscious behaviours and makes us react and reason the way we do. Our values, norms and beliefs have been influenced and learned as a result of belonging to a specific group of people and they have been shaped by a number of factors such as; the law, religion, politics, economics and so forth. It is therefore crucial not to make decisions based on how we operate in our home country.

When working in another country you will be confronted with that specific culture and it will most surely cause confusion and misunderstanding. Diversities within countries usually exceed the differences. Cultural differences can therefore, if not being detected, cause severe damage to international business relationships, create substantial obstacles to effective teamwork, slow down the efficiency of projects and in the long run affect the companies’ profitability.

To be knowledgeable and prepared for cultural differences is a great advantage to any businessman/businesswoman and to understand a business partners’ norms and values is a determining factor for success. However, to be cultural sensitive is not just important out of economic aspects, it is also important for the employees’ everyday comfort and well-being. The saying; “When in Rome, do as the Romans do” is a useful guidance to keep in mind, and can make a difference between a successful business negotiation and a straight down rejection.

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11 Cateora & Graham (2002)
12 Hofstede (1991)
13 http://www.geert-hofstede.com
14 http://www.witiger.com/internationalbusiness/globalization.htm
1.3 Sweden’s & Australia’s context
In my former section the reader learned that people’s cultural context make them communicate and act in certain ways. Examples of contextual aspects can be the law system, climate, language, values cherished, how the gender roles are perceived in the culture and so forth; it is a never-ending list. To make it easier for the reader to understand Swedes’ and Australians’ business culture and communication style which will be analysed later in this report, I would like to present a few examples of national aspects which I believe could have helped to create two diverse cultures.

The Macquarie Dictionary defines egalitarian as “asserting the equality of all people”\(^{15}\). Egalitarianism is one of the most important values in Sweden and it permeates almost every aspect of the Swedish culture.\(^{16}\) Proverbs; such as “Tala är silver, men tiga är guld” (To speak is silver, to keep silent is gold), “Lika barn leka bäst” (Birds of a feather flock together), or “Lagom är bäst” (Enough is as good as a feast), all refers to the importance of blending in and not attract too much attention; whether this may be in a formal business meeting or at a private gathering.\(^{17}\)

From early age Swedes get taught the meaning of equity and consensus, and the practicing of compromises. The infiltration process starts with parents and midwives teaching their children the importance of sharing a toy and involving everybody when playing a game. At the age of seven Swedish children start junior school. Now the educational system continues the infiltration-process with school policies and teachers who strive for equalizing the students, make them aware of social justice, and train them to seek always for consensus. By the time a Swede reach the labour market values such as egalitarianism, and consensus are since long deep rooted in the individual.\(^ {18}\)

Government laws in Sweden also amplify the idea of equality among its citizens by representing one of the world’s most developed social systems. Extensive child benefits, inexpensive child care centres, unemployment benefit funds, social assistance, parental allowance, sickness pension, free education and so forth all embraces the idea of fairness. All these benefits rest on a high tax-system in Sweden. Everybody should be treated equally and have the same prerequisites according to the Statute Book of Sweden. The people who benefit most from this system are low-and middle-class people.\(^ {19}\)

In Australia on the other hand, the people are brought up in a different culture; based on different values. Egalitarianism is not as apparent as it is in Sweden. Instead government laws have created a more competitive environment in Australia. Due to a lower tax-system; few parents can afford to put their child in over-prised child care centres, few students can afford shocking university fees, and few Australians are entitled to benefits and allowances from the government. The people who profit by this system are high-incomers.

Children in Australia start junior school when they turn five, some even when they are four years old. While the majority of the children in Sweden attend public school, the private school system are much more widely spread in Australia. Public schools are for free, but private schools are expensive. From that it follows that private schools have a much better status in Australia and

\(^{15}\) [http://www.abc.net.au/pm/stories/s296520.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/pm/stories/s296520.htm)
\(^{16}\) [http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/etiquette/doing-business-sweden.html](http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/etiquette/doing-business-sweden.html)
\(^{18}\) [http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/etiquette/doing-business-sweden.html](http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/etiquette/doing-business-sweden.html)
families who can afford to enrol their children in any of these schools do so. Australian parents also need to decide if they want to put their child in a single-school or in a mix-school. It is quite common to separate boys and girls from each other. Which school the child belongs to is displayed in the colours of their school uniforms, which all Australians are obligated to wear throughout their compulsory school period. The choice of school, the separation of the genders, and the colours of the school uniforms all reflect a more unequal culture. 20

University education and vocational training are anything but cheap in Australia. An approximately yearly fee would be >100,000 SEK. It is therefore not uncommon that Australian students are obligated to work at the same time as they study in order to finance their education. 21 A university degree in Australia, especially a master degree, is therefore a more valuable asset in Australia than it is in Sweden where university education is free of charge. 22

To fully understand a country’s culture one need to acknowledge the whole context in which the people live. Above are, as already mentioned, just a few factors that influence a culture and affect its people’s perceptions and assumptions.

1.4 Purpose of thesis
The purpose of my thesis is to study Swedes who live in Australia about their thoughts concerning business culture and communication style in the following four cultural dimensions; Power Distance, Masculinity verses Femininity, Affective verses Neutral, and Time.

More specifically, I want to investigate whether my respondents believe there are any significant differences between Swedes and Australians in above four areas.

1.5 Target group
My main target group for this thesis is Swedish business people who conduct business in Australia or are at the planning stage to set up business in Australia. Nevertheless, this thesis is probably just as useful the other way round; for Australians conducting business in Sweden, even though this group is much more limited. I also think students in the field of business communication and international business find this report useful and interesting.

Even though my cultural comparison between Swedes and Australians is not applicable to other countries, I believe it can be an eye-opener to anyone who, in one way or another, communicate and conduct business on the international arena. Knowledge and awareness of your culture’s framework, including limitations and expectations, will minimize cross-cultural misunderstandings and make people more flexible and less judgmental. 23

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20 Interview; Lindholm
21 Interview; Hast
22 Interview; Lindholm
23 Hofstede (1991)
1.6 Delimitation of the study
During the process of this study I faced a number of choices and alternatives when to choose my purpose, my theories, and my research method. Each choice would result in a number of advantages and disadvantages, and the result I would gain if I went in one direction, I might lose if I chose another direction. In most cases there is no one right way to go. With this in mind I have made my choices with careful consideration and taken my timeframe into account.

I am sure that there are plenty of ways to attack this problem and lots of possibilities to angle this research area. Having said that, I am satisfied with the choices I made and the information I have been given and I believe my interviews have led me to some really interesting results. My respondents had good knowledge of my research area and together with my theoretical base I could map out differences between the cultures and shape two rather accurate 'business culture profiles'.

My thesis’ theoretical base brings light to different communication and cultural aspects that can be found within cultures and my theoretical chapter is based on four culture scientists’ theories; William B. Gudykunst, Edward Hall, Geert Hofstede, and Fons Trompenaars. Hofstede and Trompenaars have together created 12 culture dimensions which distinguish national cultures apart, and on four of these I have based my analysis; Power Distance, Masculinity verses Femininity, Affective verses Neutral, and Time, areas in which Swedes and Australians differ most. This assumption is based on my literature review and my five years work experience in Sweden and Australia. My theoretical chapter will therefore only include these four of dimensions, however, since I believe the other 8 dimensions are still of interest when learning about culture differences I have included these in Appendix 4 and 5.

I am aware that there are other aspects than communication and culture that can affect a business relation and some of these aspects have already been mentioned in this thesis. However, these aspects will not be considered in my thesis. Neither will I cover areas such as teambuilding and management styles.

Important for the reader to be aware of when reading this thesis is that when I refer to the concept of ‘culture’ throughout this thesis; I mean the culture that is shared by most people in the country, even though I am very well aware that such culture does not consist of a homogeneous group of people; instead it consists of various subcultures.

24 Hofstede (1991)
25 Morgan (1999)
2. METHODOLOGY

This chapter starts with background information about two major research methods; quantitative and qualitative method. It continues with an explanation of how my data was collected and how the research was carried out. This chapter ends with a methodological reflection about my research.

2.1 Quantitative & Qualitative method

There are two main methods to choose from when conducting a research; quantitative and qualitative method. Observations and interviews are the two most common methods when using a qualitative approach, whereas a survey, questionnaire or an experiment are mostly used in a quantitative research. 26

According to Ghauri and Grønhaug a quantitative method is best used when your analysis use or generates numerical data and/or when the aim of your research is to accept or reject a hypothesis. A positive outcome by using a quantitative approach is the possibility to do generalisations. A weakness of the method is that a large amount of data is usually required in order to draw conclusions from the material. Another downfall is that it can be difficult for the researcher to get a general idea of the survey’s accuracy until the whole study has been accomplished and analysed. 27

The main characteristic of a qualitative research is the closeness to the research object, whether it is a person or an environment. A qualitative method is helpful when the focus is on understanding people and it is normally used when observing people’s behaviour and when studying their values. 28 The possibilities of changing directions during observations or asking additional questions during interviews are important advantages with this method. The ability to examine the respondents’ body language and tone of voice are also essential benefits. A disadvantage with the qualitative method is that it usually cost a lot of time and money compared to a quantitative method. Another one is the difficulty to detect weather the researcher or respondent are biased or if they answer the questions offhand without putting any thoughts into them. This disadvantage goes for quantitative methods as well. 29

26 Backman (1998)
27 Ghauri & Grønhaug (2005)
28 Trots (2001)
29 Holme & Solvang (2006)
2.2 Method of selection
My research is based on interviews. I chose a qualitative approach for the simple fact that I
needed the flexibility to ask additional questions according to what my respondents’ answers
were. 30 I also believe that the concepts of business communication and cultural differences are
best examined in a dialogue with open questions, which give both the respondent and myself
room for discussion. Ghauri and Grønhaug write that a quantitative research method is best used
when the purpose of the study is to accept or reject a hypothesis, or if the study is meant to be
presented as statistical data. My intention has been neither of these two. Instead an understanding
of people’s values has been in focus. 31

2.3 Data collection
Rolf Ejvegård, states that there are two main sources of data; primary data and secondary data.
Primary data is what the author has gathered first hand and secondary data is information other
people have gathered. 32 I have based my thesis on a mix of these two types; a literature review
and an interview research.

2.3.1 Secondary data
After I roughly decided what my study should cover, my next step was to collect information in
order to narrow the area down to an acceptable and interesting problem – my purpose of the
thesis. My research began with a literature review of earlier studies and theories within the area of
business communication and cultural diversity. This review was not meant to give me a full
summary of all literature within this area; rather it was meant to give me a general idea about
relevant literature. Secondary data usually provides information aimed for another purpose; therefore I carefully evaluated the data before using it in this report. 33

The secondary data I have based my thesis on have been collected from various sources.
Textbooks from my university time came in handy when looking for models and theories to
implement, as well as, books and articles provided by; Sydney State Library, Helsingborg’s
Stadsbiblioteket, Campus University’s library, and the Swedish Trade Council in Sydney.

Internet has also been a large reference bank. Keywords used when searching for relevant
information on the Internet has been for example; communication, culture, intercultural
communication, business communication, culture differences, cross-culture communication,
culture diversity, business culture, Swedish characteristics, and Australian characteristics.

2.3.2 Critical discussion of my secondary data
My thesis is based on literature from both academic books and Internet websites. The reason why
a lot of my references are collected from websites is because I have had limited access to
academic literature while writing this report. Academic literature you almost only find at
university libraries in Australia. To get access to these you have to be enrolled at a university
somewhere in Australia. Not even a foreign student, enrolled at an international university is

30 Denscombe (2000)
31 Ghauri & Grønhaug (2005)
32 Ejvegård (2003)
33 Dahmström (2000)
allowed to use their literature. The only public library in Sydney which has academic literature is ‘Sydney State Library’. However, this library do not do library loan which means that I could only use their books while reading them in the library. Since I was working during most of the library’s opening hours I only had Saturdays and sporadic free days to use their books. Consequently, I have had to rely on Internet sources.

I have been very careful while selecting my references on the Internet, and I have only used websites where I believed the information is valid and serious. I made sure that the contents on the websites I used where not too old and that they did not include irrelevant information or any advertisements that might jeopardize the information’s reliability.

2.3.3 Primary data

My thesis’ primary data is gathered information collected from ten interviews with Swedes who work in Australia. The first step in my collection process was to find suitable Swedes to interview. I started off by contacting the Swedish embassy in Canberra, the capital of Australia, to see if somebody at the embassy could put me in contact with appropriate people. The Swedish embassy advised me to sign up for the Swedish-Australian business network ‘Young Professionals’. This organisation helps young Swedes to pursue their careers in Australia by organizing seminars and workshops. 

The embassy also advised me to contact ‘The Swedish Trade Council (STC)’ in Sydney. STC helps Swedish businesses to grow internationally and the council in Sydney is represented by five Swedish full-time employees and two interns. STC was established thirty years ago and possesses fine knowledge about culture differences between Swedes and Australians. My point of contact there was Jonas Lindholm, senior project leader. He was very helpful and supplied me with a list of the majority of all Swedish companies and subsidiaries located in Sydney. From this list, together with the meetings I attended with ‘Young Professionals’, I managed to find Swedes to interview.

At the initial stage my plan was to conduct twelve face-to-face interviews. However, along the way I faced a few problems and had no choice but to do a few amendments to my original plan. The outcome was ten profound telephone interviews; two with representatives of the Swedish Trade Council in Sydney and eight with randomly selected Swedes working for eight various companies. My respondents are listed at the end of this section. Their common denominators are; Swedes who work and communicate on a regular basis with Australians and who all possess a university degree in their profession.

It was much harder than I expected it to be to find Swedes to interview. Not just hard to track them down but also to get them to accept an interview. These people already had a tight schedule and were therefore not too enthusiastic about giving away 45 minutes of their time. What I noticed though was that when I suggested a telephone interview as oppose to a face-to-face interview the people were more likely to accept.

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34 http://www.swedenabroad.com/canberra
35 http://www.youngprofessional.com.au
36 http://www.swedishtrade.se/australien
Another reason to why my choice fell on telephone interviews was Sydney’s huge geographical
distances, which I was not fully aware of at the interim of this research. When mapping out where
my respondents were based I realised that they were scattered all over Sydney’s vast region and
that it would be extremely time consuming to visit all these people in person. If sticking to my
original plan the result would have been fewer interviews, and I did not think this compromise
was a good option.

All my interviews took place as open discussions and to make sure that our discussions were
related to my four research areas I had made an interview guide beforehand (see Appendix 3). The
guide was sent out, via email, to all my respondents a week ahead of our scheduled
interviews. It gave my respondents time to collect their thoughts before their interviews and the
interview guide acted as guidance throughout my interviews. At a later stage it also helped me to
compare and analyse my respondent’s answers.

There are both advantages and disadvantages by conducting interviews over telephone. In my
case, the advantages have already been outlined. One disadvantage though is that gestures and
face expressions, which are also valuable information, goes missing. Another downfall is that a
telephone interview might give less extensive answers from the respondents.37

It is impossible for me to appreciate if and in that case how much these downfalls have affected
my research. I can only hope that they have not affected my research noticeably. I was surprised
by the amount of time my respondents spared me and the information I received. My interviews
lasted approximately 45 minutes each and I could not notice any signs of my respondents holding
back on any information.

All in all, my research was of responding nature and I am grateful for the time my respondents set
aside for my project. I have the following ten people to thank;

1. Christina Frängård, Senior Consultant, Galexia Pty Ltd
2. Erik Dahl, Business Analyst, Portland Group
3. Helena Bergström, Environmental Sustainability Coordinator, Multiplex
4. Ingrid Cornander, Senior Consultant and Account Manager Sustainability, Ogilvy PR
5. Jonas Lindholm, Project Leader, Swedish Trade Council
6. Kristin Hast, Registered Nurse, St Vincent Hospital
7. Petra Blixt, Vice Branch Manager, Pointer Australia (Pointer Sweden AB)
8. Rasmus, Sustainability Engineer, Hatch Associates Pty Ltd
9. Susanna Jansson, Graphic Designer, Fesq & Company
10. Tomas Isaksson, Management Consultant, BearingPoint

37 Dahlström (2000)
2.4 Methodological reflections

As already mentioned my research consists of 10 interviews. My respondents work for different companies and have various educational backgrounds which gave me a broad spectrum. When conducting a qualitative research, the researcher’s perceptions and/or interpretations regarding the studied subject is in focus. As a researcher it was therefore my job to try to capture my respondents’ perception and to depict the reality as they experienced it. This meant that I had to interpret their answers. Interpreting research is quite difficult since the investigation, in some way, almost always is dependent on the researcher and the environment. Therefore, to repeat a qualitative research is impossible. If another researcher were to conduct the same research as I did, using the same method and interview guide as I used, his/her conclusions would probably be different from mine. It is also possible that my own results would have been different if I conducted the same interviews with the same respondents at another time, at a different location, or if they were conducted face-to-face with my respondents. Further, if other questions had been asked maybe my conclusions would have been different. 38

During an interview, one can not ignore the so-called ‘interview effect’ in the interaction between the interviewer and the respondent. I am well aware that my own culture and background affect my interpretation of my respondents’ answers, and that this will probably result in somewhat subjective thoughts will appear in my analysis. Having said that, I had to interpret the interviews somehow and draw my own conclusions. With this in mind I have done my utmost to look at all information obtained as objective as possible, and I have tried to minimize my own influence as much as possible by being objective. I have also been careful not to ask my respondents any leading questions, add own values and thoughts into the discussions, or to use any value-charged or colourful words. 39

All my interviews were conducted in similar ways and to enhance spontaneity I carried out my interviews as dialogs, based on an interview guide I had designed to correspond to my four research areas. The interview guide worked as a basis during all my telephone interviews and it helped me adhere to my areas. Without the guide I believe I would have easily become sidetracked during my interviews since the concepts of communication and culture differences are very broad subjects. I ran through my interview guide with each respondent before the interview took place to make sure that the guide’s purpose was clear. My hope by doing this was to minimize room for ingressions during the interviews. 40

All interviews went well. However I noticed that I felt more relaxed in my role after 3-4 interviews had been conducted. By then I could predict my respondents’ reactions and answers to a certain degree and I was therefore more prepared and could easier come up with contradictory and additional questions.

To avoid distortions in the responses I also made the choice not to record my interviews, since I believe people speak more freely if not recorded. I also told my respondents that their name would not appear in my report, since I believe people are more inclined to give more honest answers when remained anonymous.

38 http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/research/relval/pop2b.cfm
39 Trots (2001)
40 Trots (2001)
When I interviewed my respondents I used a headset and was therefore able to write on the computer at the same time. To make sure that I would remember everything that was said I wrote down keywords and quotations during the interviews, and when each interview was finished I immediately wrote down all important information that had been said. My interview guide then became handy again when all interviews been conducted as it helped me to compare frequent themes and themes that were dissimilar.

All in all, I believe my interviews gave me enough material to base my analysis on. I noticed that the answers all pointed at the same direction so I do not believe that conducting more interviews would have altered my conclusions considerably.
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Since this thesis investigates culture and communication differences between Swedes and Australian, theories in the field of communication science and culture have therefore been chosen. My theoretical chapter begins with a definition of the concept of communication and it continues with a section about intercultural communication. Intercultural communication is then further discussed in William B. Gudykunst’s Anxiety/Uncertainty Management theory, which follows by Edward Hall’s High-and Low-context theory. Both these theories stress the connection between communication and culture.

After my theories about communication this chapter leads into theories about culture. It starts with a definition of the concept of culture, and continues with two well-known culture scientists’ theories; Geert Hofstede’s national cultural model, and Fons Trompenaars national business model. Both Hofstede and Trompenaars have created a dimension models each and together they present 12 culture dimensions. However, as I have already explained in my ‘Delimitation of my Study’ chapter only four of their dimensions are of interest for my analysis and therefore only these four will be explained in this chapter. The rest the reader can find in Appendix 4 and 5.

3.1 Communication

Communication can be defined as the process of transmitting information, ideas, views and feelings from one source to another. The content of the message is called information and communication is the process whereby this information creates meaning for another person. Communication can be intentional or unintentional, and to communication does not necessarily equal understanding. According to scientist William B. Gudykunst, communication occur when a person attach meaning to the information. Effective communication can be defined as when two or more individuals attach similar meanings to the message exchanged. Another definition is that effective communication reduces the risk of misunderstanding.\(^{41}\)

Communication and culture influence each other. Culture acts as a filter and it is our cultural background that decides what is important and unimportant for us to listen to and communicate to others. Different signs and symbols also have different meaning according to what culture you come from, for example can a gesture, sign or a colour communicate different information in different cultures.\(^{42}\)

\(^{41}\) Gudykunst (2003)

\(^{42}\) Gudykunst (2003)
3.2 Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication refers to an academic field of study. It seeks to understand how people from different countries and cultures behave, communicate and perceive the world around them, for example how people communicate (verbally and non-verbally), works together, approach deadlines, negotiates, build relationships and much more.\textsuperscript{43}

A lot of researchers have come up with different definitions of the concept of ‘intercultural communication’. Edward Hall was one of the first researchers to use the term. He believes that communication is culture and culture is communication. His defines intercultural communication as the process of when a message that has been produced in one culture is perceived in another culture.\textsuperscript{44}

William B. Gudykunst, professor of Communication at California State University, is another scientist who focused his study on intercultural communication. He found his interest while he was in the U.S Navy serving as an intercultural relations specialist. He then worked to promote effective communication between members of the Navy and people of different countries. Gudykunst’s definition of intercultural communication is a face to face communication between people with different cultural backgrounds.\textsuperscript{45}

Gudykunst believe that the degree of interculturalness of the communication depends on the degree of heterogeneity of the people involved. When people have a similar worldviews, the level of interculturalness is low and communication will proceed with minimal effort and maximum accuracy. Intercultural communication is especially important from a business aspect. Business communication today is intercultural communication he says. Today's organizations become more and more involved in communication across cultures, between cultures and among cultures. People of different cultural backgrounds constantly communicate with each other to achieve common goals. Today’s business is highly competitive and fast changing, and intercultural communication helps getting a competitive edge. Whether someone is giving a presentation, looking for a new supplier, or negotiating a contract, intercultural communication will play an important role, he states.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{43} Gudykunst (2003)
\textsuperscript{44} http://www.edwardthall.com/books.html
\textsuperscript{45} Gudykunst (2003)
\textsuperscript{46} Gudykunst (2003)
3.3 Gudykunst’s Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory
Most people have sometimes experienced cross-cultural differences one-way or the other; the frustration, nervousness, or difficulty in communicating with someone from a different culture. Seeing these problems, Gudykunst developed his Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory, which hinges on his belief that anxiety and uncertainty are the basic reasons for all communication failure in an intercultural business situation. 47

According to Gudykunst’s research, uncertainty is higher in intercultural encounters than in intracultural encounters. Attributional confidence, the inverse of uncertainty, is another factor influenced by cultural similarity. Research indicates that the more similar the cultures are the easier it is to learn that culture. Gudykunst’s research also indicates that people ask more questions when they are culturally dissimilar. As cultural dissimilarities increase uncertainty, being aware of these dissimilarities will increase attributional confidence he says. 48

Gudykunst defines effective communication as a process of minimizing misunderstandings. In order to do so one need to look at how similar and/or different the cultures are from each other. Gudykunst believes the best way to communicate in intercultural relations is to decrease uncertainty and increase confidence. Uncertainty refers to how well a person can predict how a stranger will behave during their initial meeting and the person’s ability to explain the strangers’ behaviour. 49

According to Gudykunst, communicative predictions are based on information from three levels. The first level is the cultural level, which involves information about the other person’s dominant values and norms. This is often the only level of information available when communicating with a stranger. The second level is the sociocultural, which includes information about the person’s group membership, or the groups to which they seek to belong. Finally there is psycho cultural data. This is information about the individual’s characteristics. 50

All communication occurs between people who have varying degrees of familiarity with each other. Gudykunst’s anxiety/uncertainty management theory focuses on intercultural encounters between people. According to Gudykunst, there are three major factors that influence communication between people from different cultures. One is cultural similarity/dissimilarity. The second is second language competence, and the last one is previous experience in the other culture. In this thesis I am focusing mainly on Gudykunst’s first communication factor.

In summary, for a person to reduce intercultural uncertainty they must have cultural knowledge. Cultural knowledge involves an understanding of the norms and communication rules of the other culture. Being aware of how cultures communicate with each other will make people feel more confident with their communication skills with that culture. 51

47 Gudykunst (2003)
48 Gudykunst (2003)
50 Gudykunst (2003)
3.4 Hall’s High- & Low-context Theory
Edward Hall, is another scientist who stresses the connection between communication and national culture. He says that it is necessary to know the culture of a country to successfully communicate with a person from another country. Hall divides cultures into two groups; High- and Low context cultures. Whether a country belongs to a Low-context or a High-context culture is reflected in the way the people communicate. Hall has especially focused his research among three areas; information processing, time orientation and interaction patterns. 52

3.4.1 Information processing
People from High-context cultures are more likely to obtain information from their personal information network, while people from Low-context cultures seek information on decisions and agreements from research bases. In High-context cultures, information is shared with only a few people and its flow is restricted. In a Low-context culture, on the other hand, people are happy to share information with each other. According to Hall High-context people are more territorial with greater concern for ownership and they mark out the areas which are theirs. People from Low-context cultures have less ownership of space, and boundaries are less important to them. They also have less concern for material ownership. 53

Another way to look at High-context versus Low-context cultures is to compare their intuitive and analytical approaches to a task at hand. Low-context cultures have a more analytical approach and they emphasise, data collection and planning. High-context cultures on the other hand have a more intuitive approach.

According to Hall, people from High-context cultures focuses on questions regarding social background and group membership while being introduced to a new person. In contrast, a Low-context person is interested in the person as an individual, and asks questions that emphasize the person’s background. 54

3.4.2 Time Orientation
How a culture view, use, and communicate their time is another area in which High-context and Low-context cultures differ. High-context cultures view time as something open and flexible, whereas in Low-context cultures time is highly organized. According to Hall, Low-context cultures are characterized by M-Time (monochromic time). This means that they concentrate on the job at hand, they plan and schedule carefully, and they put their work before personal relationships. People can here get upset when the phone rings or when the secretary comes in with another matter. They prefer one-on-one attention and can feel rather insulted when they do not get it. 55

Opposite goes for High-context cultures which are characterized by polychromic time. In these cultures people do not feel distracted if other work tasks needs to be done simultaneously and they are used to carry on several conversations at the same time. In these cultures relationships

take precedence over agendas and schedules. In these cultures the main thing is that the group moves towards the goal, rather than tick off checkpoints from a list. 56

Time, organizes our lives in many ways and how people view time differ between High-context and Low-context cultures. Low-context cultures are rule oriented and the people play by external rules. They are careful to follow rules and agendas, be on time, and they stress forward thinking and future planning. High-context cultures focus more on past accomplishments and in these cultures it is not as bad to be late as it is in a Low-context culture. Another way of comparing time orientation is to study culture’s degree of precision. For example, does the bus usually leave at the precise minute as it says in the time table? Interesting is also to study what meaning people put into words such as “late”. What does late mean to a Swede and what does it mean to an Australian? 57

3.4.3 Interaction Patterns
According to Hall, High-context cultures are brief and diffuse in their communication, and they tend to give out less information, and much is taken for granted. High-context cultures also use much nonverbal communication. In Low-context cultures, very little is taken for granted. They are more detailed focused and this also means that people in these cultures expect more explanation and information. It also means there is less chance of misunderstanding. Low-context cultures also are more focused on verbal communication rather than body language.

High-context cultures use less written and formal information. Decisions and activities focus around personal face-to-face relationships, often around a central person who has authority. Furthermore, emotions and thinking in High-context cultures are indirect and implicit and their communication style relies on voice mode and gestures between the people. In Low-context cultures on the other hand, people put their feelings and thoughts into words when they express themselves. 58

People in High-context and Low-context cultures do not regard conflicts in the same way. People in Low-context cultures interpret the source of the conflicts as being instrumental. People can therefore argue over task-oriented issues without getting personal. High-context people are more inclined to take critics personal and view conflicts as a defeat.59

Differences between cultures can also be found in the way people think, how they organize their thoughts, what information they trust as evidence, how they try to persuade others, and how people present information. Some cultures goes directly to the point in a presentation, while others place a great value on history background of the subject at hand, and finish with the main point.

In High-context cultures, such as China, people are likely to stop listing if the main point was to be presented in the beginning. They would feel it gives away the whole point and why then continuing listening? Differences between cultures can also be found in what information people

think is important to communicate and present. Some people prefer expert opinions, hard evidences, and facts that translate into numbers, statistics, and percentages. Others prefer deductive to inductive reasoning and these people have a more abstract approach, and some cultures are categorized by a relational thinking, where the person’s experience of the event is the fact that matters. Some cultures persuade by logical arguments and facts, some by emotional presentations, and some with statistical facts and technical details and analyses. In general Low-context cultures are more inclined to use statistic and other hard evidence, compared to High-context cultures.

3.5 Culture
Culture is a vague concept, and it is hard to define what culture really is. The word culture originates from the Latin word 'colere' which means to inhabit or to cultivate. Many people have tried to define culture in many different ways, and attempts to identify and describe culture have also been made within many different scientific schools, all coming up with different definitions. People also define culture in different ways depending on which culture they belong to, and the concept of culture has different meanings for different cultures.

In a cross-cultural business situation a businessman/woman needs to be aware of three levels of culture that may influence and affect the communication. These levels are; national culture, business culture and organisational culture. National culture can be defined as the dominant culture of the country and differ mostly at norms, values and beliefs. Business culture relates to a country’s etiquettes and standards when conducting business and organisational culture are the norms, values and beliefs within a company that are shared by its employees. In this thesis my main focus will be on the first level – national culture, although the business culture also will be subjected to investigation as these two levels are well connected with each other.

National culture is like a generic framework and it organises employees’ understanding of their work, their approach to it and how they should expect to be treated in certain situations. It also influences people’s interactions and it implies that one way of acting is preferable to another. These cultural expectations are particularly visible in a meeting with two very diverse cultures.

Below I have selected two culture scientists’ definitions of culture; Geert Hofstede and Fons Trompenaars. They both focus their researches around national culture; however Tropenaars’ research has a clearer business perspective.

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60 Hall (1989) in Mindess (1999)
61 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture
62 Hofstede (1991)
63 Hofstede (1991)
64 Hofstede (1991)
3.5.1 Culture definition – Geert Hofstede
Geert Hofstede is probably the most famous culture scientist and he is recognized worldwide for his national culture theory. Hofstede defines culture as:

“…the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others.”

According to Hofstede’s definition of culture all people are programmed through a process which helps them become attached to their culture. It tells them who they are and to what groups they belong to. A culture can only be fully understood by the people who belong to it, and to get a deeper understanding of a specific culture one must view the world through the members’ eyes.

Hofstede’s culture definition contains of patterns of thinking, feeling and acting learned in early childhood. He means that the mind consists of three layers of mental programming; the Individual, the Collective and the Universal. Based on these three layers he constructed his culture triangle (see below picture). The ‘Individual’ level is the personality, which is exclusive to each person. This level is to some extent inherited and to some learned. The ‘Collective’ level is the culture, which is learned from others and this level is specific to a group of people. The third level is the ‘Universal’, which relates to the individuals’ nature, such as feelings.

Hofstede focused his studies mainly on the ‘Collective’ level. He found similarities and differences all over the world and he ended up creating a five-dimension cultural model to sort out nationalities. His model is explained on page 19 and in Appendix 4. In this thesis I have also focused my research to Hofstede’s collective level.

3.5.2 Culture definition – Fons Trompenaars
The scientist Fons Trompenaars is also well-known for his business culture theory and his definition of culture is;

“…a way in which a group of people solve problems.”

Trompenaars identifies culture as a series of methods and rules created by a group of people in order to help them solve problems; particularly connected to relationships, time and the environment. He argues that culture develops from people’s need to solve basic problems in order to survive. According to Trompenaars, all cultures develop ways to confront problems, but the solutions to these problems are far from the same and that is why cultures differ significantly from each other. By studying these solutions in more than 40 countries Trompenaars identified a culture business model, which can be found on page 23 and in Appendix 5.

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65 Hofstede & Hofstede (2005) p4
66 Hofstede (2001)
67 Hofstede (2005)
68 Hofstede (2005)
69 Trompenaars (1993) p6
70 Trompenaars (1996)
Fons Trompenaars defines three layers of culture; the outer layer which is symbols of a deeper level in the culture. For example; language, food, monuments, fashions, and art. The middle layer is norms and values within the culture. For example; what is; 'right', 'wrong', 'good' and 'bad'. These norms and values are usually carried out in laws and other social control systems in the culture. The last layer is the core which consists of assumptions. In this thesis I have focused my research to Trompenaars middle layer – norms and values within the culture.

3.6 Hofstede’s National Culture Model

Geert Hofstede is one of the most popular researchers in the field of cross-cultural management. Literally thousands of studies have relied on his work to provide a framework for understanding differences in national cultures. During his work at the information technology company IBM, in the 1960’s, he performed an initial study of IBM employees’ attitudes in regard to business goals. His research consisted of branches and affiliates across fifty countries and three multicultural regions and the study continued for thirty years. Nowadays his survey covers 72 countries, and more than 116,000 survey respondents.

Hofstede aimed at developing a commonly acceptable terminology to describe national cultures. The first outcome was a four-dimension national culture model. The four dimensions were; Power distance (PDI), Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV), Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS), and Uncertainty avoidance (UAI). More recently, Hofstede added a fifth dimension to his model; Long-term orientation versus Short-term orientation. This dimension was found after Hofstede had been studying a survey about Chinese scholars’ values. This survey was conducted by Michael Harris Bond and included students across 23 countries round the world.

All five dimensions in Hofstede’s national culture model are measured on index scales from 0 to 100 which enable comparisons across cultures. However, as already mentioned in my ‘Delimitation of Study’ section, only two of Hofstede’s dimensions will be explained in this chapter; Power Distance, and Masculinity verses Femininity. If interested, the reader can learn about the other three dimensions in Appendix 4.

71 http://www.brefigroup.co.uk/newsletters/november_2003_3.html
72 Hofstede (1991)
73 http://www.geert-hofstede.com
74 Hofstede (1991) p 36-37
3.6.1 Power distance (PDI)
Hofstede’s ‘Power distance’ dimension indicates the extent to which a culture deals with inequalities among its people and how power is communicated in the culture. It also reflects how people expect and accept unequal power and responsibilities. On Hofstede’s power distance dimension Sweden scored 31 and Australia 36.

![Figure 1. Sweden's and Australia's 'Power distance' dimension indexes.](http://feweb.uvt.nl/center/hofstede/page3.htm)

In companies with a high power distance there are big gaps between employees and managers and the companies are characterised by formal hierarchies and autocrat leadership. Lots of people are reporting and supervising to each other, but the power is often centralised within a few hands and the salary gaps between the levels are wide.

In high power distance cultures employees are expected to be told what to do and they rarely contradict managers’ decisions. All communication between the manager and the employee initiates by the manager and it is accepted that managers do not consult employees on matters concerning them. Status and power are important in these cultures and already well-paid managers are expected to strengthen their positions with status symbols and other fringe benefits. Employees usually get promoted according to seniority and in most of these cultures it is a positive thing if the manager is a bit older. In high power distance cultures people rarely show emotions in public.

In low power distance cultures companies are flat structured with few management levels. The gaps between employees and managers are quite small which means that managers are more easily replaceable in these cultures. This equal relationship results in small salary ranges and privileges are usually not desirable. Low power distance companies are more decentralized and hierarchical systems are created for convenience rather than to show status. In low power distance cultures employees are willing to question authority and they expect to be consulted by their managers. At the other end managers accept and appreciates when employees express their opinions.

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75 http://feweb.uvt.nl/center/hofstede/page3.htm
76 Hofstede (1991)
77 Hofstede (1991)
3.6.2 Femininity verses Masculinity (MAS)

Hofstede’s ‘Femininity verses Masculinity’ dimension deals with social and cultural aspects of masculine and feminine roles and the distribution of roles between the genders. Masculine cultures stress earnings, recognition and challenge whereas feminine cultures stress good working relationship, cooperation and employment security. 78 On Hofstede’s masculinity versus femininity dimension Sweden scored 5 and Australia 61. 79

![Figure 2. Sweden’s and Australia’s ‘Femininity verses Masculinity’ dimension indexes.](image)

Above figure is an own creation by Johanna Gustafsson, based on Hofstede’s research scores.

Companies that are characterised by strong masculinity are often driven by men and the men also possess all high positions in the company. In masculine cultures the gender roles are clearly distinct. Men are supposed to be tough, assertive and focused on their careers and they sometimes come across as a bit ‘macho’. Women are supposed to be more modest and caring and they should focus on family duties at a higher extent than the men. In strong masculine cultures most women are housewives. In a feminine culture the genders are more equal. Men have the same modest and caring values as the women and the women are pursuing their careers and striving for performance almost to the same extent as the men. 80

The two poles also work differently. In a masculine culture a conflict should be resolved by a good battle – “Let the best man win!” Masculine cultures avoid trade unions when conducting business. Trade unions are viewed as difficult and disturbing elements of the work flow. Opposite is true for feminine cultures. Employees settle conflicts by negotiations and compromises and they seek for consensus. Feminine cultures are sympathetic to unions and use them frequently in various kinds of negotiations.

The work at the individual level in masculine cultures are characterised by individuality and the people are rewarded according to seniority and performance. Employees who work in masculine companies prefer to work monotonously rather than in a group. In a feminine culture on the other hand the employees value mutual help, social contact and teamwork. Here the employees get rewarded according to their knowledge, education and performance.

Masculine and feminine cultures create different management types. In a masculine organization the manager is decisive and makes most decisions singlehanded. Opposite is true in feminine cultures where this autocrat leadership is frowned upon. In feminine cultures there is a preference for making decisions in a group and the manager is less visible. 81

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78 Hofstede (1991)
80 [http://feweb.uvt.nl/center/hofstede/page3.htm](http://feweb.uvt.nl/center/hofstede/page3.htm)
81 Hofstede (1991)
3.6.3 Criticism of Hofstede’s research
Hofstede has been criticised for his rather static way of relating to cultures and also for describing individuals as passive beings. One of his critics is Gareth Morgan who argues that culture must be understood as a dynamic and developing process. Morgan himself defines culture as:

"...an active, living phenomenon through which people create and recreate their worlds."  

Also Hofstede’s national culture model has been criticised in many aspects. The most common criticism is that the research’s samples are not representative. The people who participated in the survey came from one single company (IBM), worked within one branch (computer science) and mostly consisted of middle-class employees. The critics also say that IBM is a strong US-derived organization with a strong business culture and that this must have influenced the employees’ values and answers.

Hofstede has also been criticized for how the survey was constructed and carried out. It was conducted by Americans and Europeans and the critics say that it is therefore partial in its design, but also in the analysis of the answers. Information regarding the survey’s reliability and validity are also limited which question the methodology even further according to the critics.

Another criticism is that Hofstede’s survey was conducted four decades ago. The critics states that cultures are constantly changing and developing and people’s values become more integrated due to the globalisation. Because of this critics argue that Hofstede’s research is outmoded and no longer up to date. They also criticise the amount of dimensions in Hofstede’s model; five dimensions are simply not enough to convey and define cultural differences.

Despite all criticism, most of the critics admit that Hofstede’s survey shouldn’t be fully dismissed, and that his research still works as a good starting point for realizing how cultures differ from each other. His research has also remained quite robust due to its large scale measurement.  

3.7 Trompenaar’s Cultural Business Model
Fons Trompenaars studied under Geert Hofstede’s supervision at the Wharton School of Business. This was the beginning of his career as a culture researcher. Later he was employed by Shell and allocated to research how cultural differences, business practice and leadership knowledge could affect global business and international leadership amongst Shell’s management.

Opposite to Hofstede, Trompenaars did not focus his research to just one single company. Instead he based his theories on a research which covered 15,000 people from various companies, across fifty countries. From the collected samples 75 per cent of the participants had management positions and 25 per cent covered secretarial positions.  

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82 http://www.onepine.info/mcult.htm
83 Hill (2007)
84 Trompenaars (1996)
The outcome of this research was a cultural business model based on seven dimensions; Universalism verses Particularism, Individualism verses Communitarianism, Affective verses Neutral, Specific verses Diffuse, Achievement verses Ascription, Time, and Internal verses External. However, based on my limited purpose, only the two following dimensions will be explained in this chapter; Affective verses Neutral, and Time. If interested, the reader can find the other five in Appendix 5.

3.7.1 Affective verses Neutral – Do we display our emotions?
Trompenaars’ ‘Affective verses Neutral’ dimension relates to the display of emotions. Rationality and emotion affect relationships between people. Which of these two dominates depends upon whether the culture is affective or neutral.

An employee with an emotional approach seeks an emotional response, such as “I feel the same way as you on this subject.” A neutral or rationale approach seeks a more indirect response, such as "I agree with your suggestion and I give you my support.”

Employees from neutral cultures do not express their emotions in public. They keep them controlled and they rarely talk about vulnerable subjects, such as lack of health, relationship problems and so forth with their work colleagues. Their upbringings have taught them that this is incorrect.

In a strong affective culture it is not considered necessary to hide feelings and keep them to yourself. People are used to show feelings in public by laughing out loud, use a strong body language, grimacing, and gesturing. They are very spontaneous in there way of communicating and for a strong neutral person this approach can sometimes come across as a bit ‘aggressive’.

3.7.2 Time – Do we do things one at a time or several things at once?
Every culture has developed their own response to time and this is communicated in all areas within the culture; literatures, music, art, work and so forth. Trompenaars’ time dimension has two aspects: the importance a culture gives to the past, present and future, and how they structure their time.

Cultures can be either past-, present- or future-oriented. A past-oriented culture views the future as a reflection of the past’s experiences. The respect for ancestors and historical experiences is huge. In present-oriented culture people do not give much attention to past experiences nor to future prospects. Instead they let day-by-day experiences direct their lives. In future oriented cultures most activities are directed towards future prospect and future planning.

85 http://www.7d-culture.com/Content/cont042.htm
86 http://www.brefigroup.co.uk/newsletters/november_2003_3.html
87 Tropenaars (1996)
88 http://www.7d-culture.com/Content/dim_4.htm
89 Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars (2000)
90 Tropenaars (1996)
Time can be structured in two ways; in a straight forward line; hour by hour, minute by minute, which is called sequentialism. The other way is named synchronism and here the time is structured in cycles of minutes, days and years. Employees who structure time sequentially tend to do one thing at a time. They prefer planning and it is important to stick to the plan. Time commitments are extremely important and it is crucial to stay on schedule and meet deadlines. Employees who structure time synchronically usually do several things at a time. Time is more flexible and intangible and plans change easily. Time commitments are desirable, but not absolute. 91

According to Trompenaars can employees from cultures which are used to do several things at the time can get upset with employees who are used to do only one thing at the time. They find them lazy and not flexible enough. Opposite can employees who are used to focus on one thing at the time accuse employees with many activities going on at the same time for not paying full attention to a project. 92

Trompenaars time dimensions have a lot of similarities with Edward Hall’s theories about time. Hofstede’s sequentially verses synchronically structure is the same as Hall’s monochromic verses polychromic structure.

3.7.3 Criticism of Trompenaars’ research
Hofstede (1996) has criticized Trompenaars’ and Hampden-Turner’s research and he claims that their theory is not supported by their database. According to Hofstede only two dimensions can be identified and both of them correlate with Hofstede’s “Individualism” dimension. In a response to this criticism, Trompenaars presented a contrasting list of assumptions attributed to Hofstede’s work and his own, to show their different points of view. Hofstede’s approach appeared to be about the analysis of the variables of national culture, whereas Trompenaars’ and Hampden-Turner’s were more involved in the process of cultural creation.93

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91 http://www.7d-culture.com/Content/dim_6.htm
92 http://www.brefigroup.co.uk/newsletters/november_2003_3.html
93 http://bora.nhh.no:8080/bitstream/2330/1467/1/Hole%20Anders%202006.pdf
4. ANALYSIS

In this chapter I have presented the results of my research. Lots of interesting aspects were discussed during my interviews. However, my analysis will only focus on those differences that my respondents thought most evident between Swedes’ and Australians’ culture and communication styles, within my four chosen areas; Power distance, Masculinity versus Femininity, Affective verses Neutral, and Time. Here and there throughout this analysis, the reader will find quotations which reinforce and illustrate my respondents’ ideas and experiences.

This analysis is delimited to only present differences between Swedes and Australians. It will not present any solutions or ideas of how these culture differences can be bridged.

4.1 Power Distance

On Hofstede’s ‘Power distance’ dimension Sweden scored 31, which means a very weak power distance, according to Hofstede. Sweden is thus ranked the sixth country of 50. Australia scored 36 on the scale and is compared to the world average of 55 considered to have a relatively low power distance.  

Based on these scores one would assume that the two cultures have a quite similar business structure and communication style. According to my respondents, this is not the case. Instead my interviews confirmed rather the opposite.

4.1.1 Business Hierarchy

All my respondents were in agreement that Sweden and Australia differ considerably in the way their companies are structured, and also in how these structures are communicated out to the employees. According to them, Australian companies are much more hierarchy structured than Swedish companies. One area in which this is reflected and demonstrated is in their communication style. For example, Australia’s more hierarchy structure decides who is allowed to communicate in certain situations and who is authorised to make decisions in negotiation situations. One of my respondents described the Australian communication process like;

“In Australia, the boss is the boss and other opinions are not put forward in the external meeting.”

A culture’s hierarchy structure also effect how information is transferred within the companies. My respondents are convinced that Australians are more confident and used to delegate tasks down the hierarchy and also to give out orders to colleagues than what Swedes are. They believe that the reason behind this is that Australian companies are structured with more management levels and supervising employees which results in a structure in which all employees are under the instruction of an immediate manager or supervising employee. They are therefore more used

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94 Hofstede (1991)
95 Hofstede (1991)
to an assertive communication and leadership style. Two of my respondents emphasised this when they said:

“Many Australians seem to work under the instruction of an immediate manager, without any particular will to take the lead on problems or change their working environment.”

The reliance of management guidance in Australia is great, and the underlying assumption seems to be that a well defined business structure makes the employees more efficient.”

According to my respondents, the Swedish business structure and communication style is very different compared to the Australian. They also mentioned that Swedish companies have not as many management levels which also are in line with Hofstede’s definitions of ‘low-power distance’ cultures.96 Also, my respondents believe that each management level in Sweden is characterised by a more team-oriented communication style whereas Australians have a more assertive style. They believe that Swedes, in general, do not like to act the commander. Instead Swedes are more careful when to delegate tasks and when to give out orders to co-workers.

According to William Gudykunst’s Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory, above communication styles can easily cause frustration and misunderstandings when people with high interculturalness (big differences between the cultures) conduct business with each other. In his theory he stresses the importance of understanding the norms and communication rules of the other person’s culture in order to minimise misunderstandings. He believes that being aware of how cultures communicate with each other in certain situation will make people feel more confident with their communication skills with that culture. Gudykunst believes that anxiety and uncertainty are the basic reasons for all communication failure in an intercultural business situation and you minimise uncertainty by cultural knowledge.97

One evident situation in which Swedes and Australians different communication styles are displayed is in the negotiation process. According to my respondents the Swedish negotiation team is usually selected based on their skills, knowledge, and/or their ability to negotiate. The team consists of people with certain expertise that can be relevant or of use for the negotiation discussion, regardless of seniority or status. The Australian negotiation team on the other hand has a different structure in which senior role and authority to make decisions plays a bigger role. One of my respondents described the Australian negotiation process as;

“The Australian negotiation team is led by the most senior person in the team and this person directs questions throughout the meeting to the team members.”

According to my respondents, this is not in line with the Swedish negotiation style, where the team members are more or less equal during the negotiation. One person is usually leading the discussion, but it does not necessarily have to be the most senior manager in the group. Instead the most knowledgeable person in that specific area is put in charge, regardless of his/her position in the company. What qualities the cultures communicate to be important in certain situations has according to Edward Hall a lot to do with whether the culture belongs to a high-context or a low-context culture. According to Hall, the reliance of people who possess facts in specific areas is an

96 Hofstede (1991)
97 Gudykunst (2003)
indication of low-context behaviour whereas relying on seniority is a more high-context behaviour. 98

Another communication difference my respondents brought up was that in Sweden employees usually are more or less free to speak their mind and participate in discussions at any time throughout meetings, without being asked. My respondents believe that this is not as common in Australia and that among Australians this can instead be perceived as a bit too forward. One of my respondents said;

“People tend to think I am very direct with my managers and speak my mind. I believe this is just how we Swedes communicate.”

Another difference that was brought up during my interviews was how status is communicated in the cultures, amongst colleagues and out to stakeholders. One area that frequently came up during these discussions was the use of job titles and how they are communicated to achieve power. My respondents believe that Australians are more status oriented, compared to Swedes and they believe that Australians use their titles more often when communicating with other people; in emails but also in person. One of my respondents said;

“When Australians introduce each other to business associates they often use their full name and their title. Swedes only use their full name unless their title is of special importance.”

One of my respondents said that he once been told by an Australian that their frequent use of fashionable titles is not so much a manifestation of power but a reward for hard work. When mentioning this to some of my other respondents, most of them were sceptic and said that they still believe status is important to Australians, at lease in comparison with Swedes who they believe are more relaxed about letting their work speak for itself. They also believe Swedes tend to use titles more as practical tools to structure employees’ tasks rather than to demonstrate status. According to Hofstede’s research, Australians inclination to centralise the power and their frequent use of titles demonstrate that they belong to a higher ‘Power distance’ culture than Swedes do. 99 Parallels can also be drawn to Gudykunst’s theory which state that the culture acts as a filter for us people and that it is our cultural background that decides what information is important and unimportant for us to listen to and communicate to others. Based on my research; Australians find it more important to communicate titles than Swedes. 100

4.1.2 Roles

Another area connected with Sweden’s and Australia’s ‘power distance’ score is people’s protectiveness of their individual space and authority sphere. 101 All my respondents believe Swedes and Australians differ dramatically here. Australians were described by my respondents as being very protective of their work areas and in Australia each employee’s role is clearly definable with distinct assignments attached. One of my respondents described it like;

“Australians seem to be more protective of their territories and are more unlikely to seek support. It is more of a “my ground, I fix mentality.”

98 Mindess (1999)
99 Hofstede (1991)
100 Gudykunst (2003)
101 Hofstede (1991)
According to my respondents, in Australia territories are important to respect and to trespass or encroach on somebody’s authorisation is not looked kindly on. Australians therefore rarely act outside their areas of respect for their colleagues’ territories. Instead they delegate or redirect the issues to the right person. Not even to bypass a manager in order to solve a minor problem is appreciated in Australia, according to my respondents. The majority of them have experienced issues with managers who have been offended after been bypassed. One of my respondents said:

“If I need help with something and I know who could help me, I just can’t go directly to this person. Instead I have to communicate with this person’s manager to ask for approval. Stupid! Since the whole thing can take ten times longer. It’s a waste of my time!”

Both Hofstede and Hall draw parallels to culture’s protectiveness in their theories. According to Hofstede, protectiveness of territories indicates a higher power distance. Hall also confirms this statement but instead of using power distance as a concept he uses high-context behaviour. According to Hall, high-context cultures are characterized by a restricted information flow, which is only shared among a few people. These people are also quick to mark out their territories and they do not like when people invade these.

According to my respondents, Swedes do not accommodate themselves to these protective rules and communication style. Instead, they said that in Sweden, employees on all levels usually have the freedom to communicate freely, make decisions and solve unexpected problems without asking for managers’ permission. In most cases, Swedish managers do not feel threatened by this; since the most important thing is to solve the problem, rather than to demonstrate status. They also emphasize that in Sweden individual decisions and personal responsibility is what counts and to act outside one’s area is much welcomed if the purpose is to speed up the work process or to relieve pressure from a co-worker.

When I asked my respondents why the believe Swedes are less protective of their authority areas, they said that in Sweden roles are not as defined as they are in Australia, instead, people’s authority areas more or less flow into each other. This team-oriented and flat communication style is according to Hofstede an indication of a low-power distance culture and according to Hall it is a low-context behaviour. My respondents also said that in Sweden it is an accepted fact that the more knowledge and information the employees possess of their company’s progress and goals, and the more influence they have of their work environment, the more motivated do they become. The more motivated the employees become the harder do they work and the more do they achieve. The results are; a more positive work atmosphere, less sick leaves, and in the long run, an increased profitability. According to Gudykunst, the degree of interculturalness of the communication depends on the degree of heterogeneity of the people involved. He says that when people view things in a similar way, for example; information sharing among employees, the communication will proceed with minimal effort and maximum accuracy, if they not share the same view, as in above case according to my respondents, confusion, misunderstandings and irritation can easily occur.

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102 Hofstede (1991)
103 Mindess (1999)
105 Gudykunst (2003)
Another interesting area discussed during my interviews, which also reflects Hofstede’s characteristic traits attached to high- and low-power distance cultures, is how the manager’s role is communicated in the cultures’ companies. According to my respondents, the Swedish and Australian culture has created two different ideal manager roles. My respondents, describe the ideal Swedish manager as a resourceful and knowledgeable coach, who must be a good listener and motivate the employees to be creative and take personal responsibility. In contrast, they describe the Australian manager as a commander. My respondents’ perceptions of the Swedish and Australian manager’ styles are also in line with the attributes Hofstede attach to high- and low-power distance cultures. According to him high-power distance cultures, such as Australia, is characterised by autocrat leadership whereas low-power distance cultures, such as Sweden, have a more flat leadership style. 106

4.2 Masculinity verses Femininity

Hofstede’s Masculinity verses Femininity dimension refers to the distribution of roles between the genders and it also deals with how inclined the cultures are to do compromises when communicating and negotiating. Sweden scored 5 on this scale which means that Sweden is a very feminine country according to Hofstede, indeed Sweden is the most feminine country of the 50 studied by Hofstede. Australia on the other hand, scored 61, which is a high score of masculinity.

This chapter begins with an explanation of Sweden’s and Australia’s social gender roles and continues with the consensus aspect which different the cultures’ communication style apart.

4.2.1 Social Gender Roles

According to Hofstede, Sweden is a highly feminine culture which means that the gender roles are close to equal in the Swedish culture. Australia, on the other hand is a masculine culture and the genders are not as equal here as they are in Sweden. 107 My respondents all agreed with Hofstede’s research results and they brought up various examples of areas in which these differences are portrayed, such as government laws, TV commercials, and work policies. 108 One of my respondents described the inequalities communicated in Australia like;

“Australia is like 15 years behind Sweden! All the households’ commercials on the telly are played by women, same as it was in Sweden in the mid -90”

According to my respondents it is communicated throughout the Australian culture that men and women are different and my respondents said that they believe the cultures add different expectations of male and female duties and attributes. They also believe that the inequalities between the genders are defended by both sexes in Australia. Below quotes were given to me

106 Hofstede (1991)
107 Hofstede (1991)
108 Interview; Lindholm
when I asked two of my respondents to compare the gender roles communicated in the Swedish and the Australian culture;

"Australian women are more feminine and girly than in Sweden, and Australian men are as macho rugby player who are supposed to take care of their sensitive and vulnerable women"

"Australian men are very sweet and they are much more of a gentleman than Swedish men are. They know how to treat at women. They open doors for you; wait for you to get out of the lift first, and they carry all your heavy stuff"

According to my respondents, the cultures’ social gender roles are reflected and communicated in various business situations. One example they brought up was that Australian women seem to have more difficulty in climbing the corporate ladder due to the “glass ceiling” they encounter near the top. A parallel can here be drawn to Gudykunst’s theory about how signs and symbols, in this case male and female roles, have different meaning in the Swedish and Australian culture. For example, Australian men/women is connected with different characteristic traits compared to Swedish men/women.  

Another thing my responded mentioned was that men and women seem to be more segregated in Australia, both at work and outside of work;

“Girls tend to hang out with girls and guys with guys.”

According to my respondents, Swedes are more used to mix the genders. It is common for men and women to hang out together, both at work and outside of work. Some of my respondents brought up the cultures’ school system as a possible reason behind this, or at least they believed the school system to be a contributory cause behind the separation of the genders. In Australia it is common that schools separate the children in boys’- and girls’ schools, whereas in Sweden single-schools are extremely uncommon. 

Another area discussed during my interviews was job advertisements; differences in language between the genders, but also differences found between the cultures as to what information is important to communicate. According to my respondents, there are noticeable differences in advertisements aimed for men and advertisements aimed for women in Australia; both in language and approach. The ones aimed for women have a more sensitive language and they also seem to assume that women do not want to work long hours and work too hard. For example are almost all part-time job ads aimed for women and it is common that the women are addressed as; ‘Want to pursue your career and still have time for your children?’ or ‘Ideal job for a working mother!’.

My respondents believe that these differences have to do with the fact that women in Australia stay home with children to a higher extent than men, and also to a higher extent than Swedish women. Also, in Australia men are supposed to be one supporting the family financially. According to my respondents, these gender differences are not as apparent in Swedish job advertisements. My respondents also believe that Swedish and Australian advertisements differ from each other. While Australian advertisements seek hard-working and achieve focused people, Swedish advertisements seek team-oriented people who can meat deadlines. My respondents also

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110 Interview; Lindholm
111 Interview; Lindholm
said that Australian ads seek people according to senior title whereas Swedish ads seek people according to education and experience. According to Hofstede, this communication style indicates that Australia is a masculine culture and Sweden is a feminine culture.\textsuperscript{112}

\subsection*{4.2.2 Consensus}

According to my respondents, Swedes advocates cooperative behaviour to a higher extent whereas Australians advocates competition. They also believe that Australians are less willing to do compromises in a business negotiation, whereas Swedes’ always try to maintain the feeling of consensus. My respondents explained that one-sided decisions are not in line with Swedes communication style and that Swedes are afraid that they might jeopardize the feeling of consensus and the harmony. Therefore Swedes prefer to perceive the negotiation process as a collaboration phase where everybody involved or affected by a decision should be able to raise their voice and voice their views. According to Hofstede, Swedes and Australians communication style indicates that Swedes belong to a feminine culture. Australians’ more unilateral way of taking decisions, without much discussion with co-workers, indicates that Australians belong to a masculine culture.\textsuperscript{113}

When asking my respondents why they believe Swedes are more inclined to compromise in a communication and negotiation situation, I got an interesting respond from one of my respondents. He said he believes it is because Swedes are more used to deal with other nationalities due to their; geographical location, their membership in the EU, and the fact that Swedes as a small population always been subjected to foreign influences. He also mentioned Swedes’ and Australians’ travel pattern as a possible reason;

\begin{quote}
    \textit{“Swedes travel to a greater extent than Australians. Consequently they are more used to communicate with international people and therefore more ready to do compromises.”}
\end{quote}

My respondents also believe that Swedes and Australians differ not only in the compromise aspect but also for the length of the negotiation process. They said that Swedes tend to stay longer in the process since everyone needs to have the right to contribute and that decisions will only be made once everyone has had their say. Swedes therefore rarely make decisions during their first meeting. At this stage they just communicate and evaluate the people, the company and the proposal. Several meetings are required before a negotiation is being made. According to Hall, this behaviour is typical of a low-context culture. He says that low-context cultures are more detailed focused and they need more information before cutting a deal.\textsuperscript{114}
4.3 Affective verses Neutral

During my interviews my respondents attached different characteristic traits to Swedes’ and Australians’ communication style. Swedes were portrayed to be polite, reserved and controlled. Australians were connected with superlatives such as; assertive, out-going and laid back.

This section focuses on difference in how Swedes and Australians communicate when it comes to; approaching style, emotion and confrontation.

4.3.1 Approaching Style

According to my respondents, both Swedes and Australians are frank and direct in their communication; what you say will be taken literally. However, when comparing Swedes’ and Australians’ approaching style my respondents believe the cultures differ quite a lot. They described Swedes as are more restrained and reserved in their communication compared to Australians who they believe to be more laid back and informal. One of my respondents said;

“Swedes are straightforward in their approach towards topics and tasks and Australians are straightforward in their personal approach and emotional matters.”

When I asked my respondents why they believe Australians to be more laid back in their communication, another of them responded;

“Brotherhood seems to be a deep-rooted value in Australia and Australian men address each other as ‘mate’. This would never happen in Swedes where everyone just says ‘you’.”

Another difference my respondents brought to my attention was the people’s expressiveness and their inclination to elaborate when communicating. According to my respondents, Swedes rarely use a colourful language and they usually not elaborate during a conversation. Instead they try to keep everything in moderation. My respondents believe this behaviour has a lot to do with the egalitarian value (not to attract too much attention) that permeates the Swedish culture. 115 Australians on the other hand, they believe, use a more colourful language compared to Swedes. One of them said;

“In Australia it is very common that both men and women approach women with words such as; sweetheart, darling, honey and love, even if they never met them before. It is very cute, but in the beginning it felt strange since I’m not used to that.”

According to Trompenaars, neutral cultures try to avoid their emotions in public whereas affective cultures are more inclined to display their emotions. 116 My respondents’ above description of Swedes and Australians therefore indicates that Swedes belong to a more neutral culture than Australians.

116 Trompenaars (1996)
Another interesting aspect discussed, when comparing Swedes’ and Australians’ approaching style was what information the two cultures seek when being introduced to a stranger. What questions do they ask in order to get to know the person? According to my respondents Swedes and Australians tend to ask different questions. My respondents said that the first questions Swedes are likely to ask a new person is; where do you live? What do you do for living? What are your hobbies? Australians, on the other hand, they believed are more inclined to ask questions such as; which area did you grow up in? Which school did you attend? What company do you work for?

When I asked my respondents why they believe Swedes and Australians ask different questions most of their responses were connected to the ‘What do you do for living?’ question. They explained that Swedes seem to be very work-focused and that Swedes seem to judge people by what they do for living. I found these comments very interesting since the rest of my study pointed towards Australians being more competitive and status focussed.

Personally, I do not think Swedes are more inclined to judge people by their work than Australians are. Instead I believe that Swedes inclination to ask a new person what he/she does for living is related to Hall’s ‘high-context and low-context theory’. According to Hall, people from high-context cultures try to get to know a new person by placing the person in a group membership and people from low-context cultures focus on the person as an individual when asking him/her questions. My respondents’ comments would therefore mean that Swedes use a more low-context approach when meeting a new person whereas Australians use a more high-context approach. This means that Swedes tendency to ask what the person work with has nothing to do with being judgemental. Instead it is just one way of ‘attacking a problem’ - to get to know the person.  

A parallel can here be drawn to Trompenaars’ culture theory who hinges on the assumption that culture differences originates in peoples way of solving basic problems, connected to relationships, time and the environment. According to Gudykunst, effective and successful communication has a lot to do with how well a person can predict how a stranger will behave during their initial meeting and the person’s ability to explain the strangers' behaviour.

Another interesting area in which Swedes and Australians differ according to my respondents is ‘personal space’. My respondents believe that Swedes are more protected of their personal space and that they tend to leave a larger distance between each other while communicating, compared to Australians. My respondents also think that Swedes do not feel as comfortable with proximity and that they try to avoid any unnecessary touching. Australians, on the other hand, seem to think that touching is a gesture of friendliness and affection, and are therefore more relaxed about their personal space. One of my respondents said;

“Australian men kiss women on their cheeks and exchange boyish hand shakes or a slap on the shoulder when being introduced to a new person. When Swedes greet they just shake hands”

I found it interesting that my study shows that Australians are much more protective of their territories at work, compared with Swedes, but less protective of their personal space. According

117 Mindess (1999)
118 Trompenaars (1996)
119 Gudykunst (2003)
to Trompenaars, Australians above communicative behaviour indicates that they belong to a more affective culture than Swedes.\textsuperscript{120}

Humour was another area that came up for discussion during a couple of my interviews. My respondent said that Australians are more inclination to use humour when communicating. Even teasing comments are not uncommon. They believe this is used by Australians to cheer people up and is not meant to be offensive in any way. When asking them about Swedes humoristic tendency, they all believed that Swedes are more reserved in their communication style and that they usually do not joke with a business associate unless they know them very well.

4.3.2 Emotions & Confrontation
Sweden’s femininity tendency and Australia’s masculine inclination has, according to my respondents, created two different ways of communicating and dealing with conflicts. All my respondents agreed that it is very rare to witness a Swede or an Australian demonstrate anger or to use a strong vocabulary in public. However, my respondents believe Swedes and Australians have different approaching styles when faced with difficult situations. One of my respondents compared Swedes and Australians like:

“*Australians try to solve problems instead of burying their heads in the sand and hoping they’ll go away*”

Above quotation may be a bit exaggerated, however; is still in line with my respondents’ view of how Swedes and Australians deal with conflicts. My respondents believe that Swedes try their best to stay away from emotional conversations, disagreements, and open conflicts as much as possible. When opinions divide or disagreements occur, Swedes tend to either leave the subject or try to compromise in order to settle the situation. Australians, on the other hand, seem more inclined, according to my respondents, to bring disagreements up for discussion and they also said that they seem more comfortable when finding themselves in difficult situations. Some of my respondents even said that Australians seem to enjoy lively debates.

The confrontation aspect is touched upon in both Hofstede and Trompenaars theories. According to Hofstede, Swedes’ way of settle conflicts by negotiations and compromises indicates a feminine, whereas Australians’ more direct approach to settle conflicts is a more masculine behaviour.\textsuperscript{121} Swedes’ more reserved communication approach to conquer a problem are in line with Trompenaars’ ‘Neutral’ characteristics traits, whereas Australians’ more spontaneous and open communication approach is more connected with Trompenaars ‘Affective’ characteristics traits.\textsuperscript{122}

A relating difference between the two cultures’ communication styles is how criticism should be presented. According to my respondents, Swedes believe criticism should be communicated in a non-personal and diplomatic way and it must always be directed towards aspects of the problem.

\textsuperscript{120} Trompenaars (1996)
\textsuperscript{121} Hofstede (1991)
\textsuperscript{122} Trompenaars (1996)
My respondents believe that the reason for this is because Swedes easily take criticism as an attack on their personality. According to my respondents, Australians seem to be more upfront when delivering criticism and they do not seem as inclined to take criticism personal. A few of my respondents also said that Australians often respond to criticism and contradicting opinions with humour.

4.4 Time

Time is viewed as a limited resource by most cultures and just like money people speak about saving time, earning time, spending time, and wasting time. The American idiom “time is money” is a well-known concept that influences the whole business culture. Time organizes people’s lives in many ways and how we use it is well connected with how we communicate in various situations and what information is important to us.

According to my respondents, Swedes and Australians use, view and communicate time differently. This section focuses on a couple of time aspects in which the two cultures differ most according to my respondents; Work-time versus Private-time, Planning, Details, & Punctuality.

4.4.1 Work-time versus Private-time
In both the Swedish and Australian culture the concept of time is of high importance, according to my respondents. However, they believe that Swedes and Australians use their time differently and they also believe that they communicate the time aspect differently.

One difference that was brought up during my interviews was how Swedes and Australians distinguish between work-time and private-time. According to my respondents Swedes are careful to separate these concepts and they do not put much time into relationship building chitchats while at work. Neither do they devote themselves to much ‘small talk’ at a start of a business meeting. Instead they move directly down to business. My respondents believe this is a way to show efficiency and a wish not to waste the other person's time. They also said that in Sweden work is not communicated to be fun. Enjoy yourself you do in your spare time or on your breaks. Instead, Swedes should be 100% focused when working and leave personal chitchats with colleagues for their breaks. Swedes communicative behaviour; to put work before personal relationships, is according to Hall a low-context behaviour. 123

According to my respondents Australians, on the other hand, are more inclined to mix work-time and private-time and Australians encourage a little bit of ‘small talk’ before a meeting to establish a relationship. In contrast with Swedes, Australians are also happy to engage themselves in discussions about personal matters at any time during work. One of my respondents even said;

123 Mindess (1999)
“If you don’t put aside your work and share your weekend troubles with your Aussie colleagues on Monday morning they think you’re weird”

How Swedes and Australians view their work-time and private-time is also reflected in how inclined the cultures are to mix personal-life with their work-life. According to my respondents, Swedes are more inclined to distinguish these than Australians are. For example in Australia, once a relationship has been established between two business partners it is not uncommon for the next business meeting to take place at a pub. Australians are in that way quite informal in their communication style and to negotiate over a drink is a good way to mix business with pleasure. This would rarely happen in Sweden according to my respondents who believe Swedes value a more modest, reserved and traditional way of doing business. Being aware of the other culture’s communication style will make people feel more confident with their communication skills with that culture according to Gudykunst.  

4.4.2 Planning & Details & Punctuality

According to my respondents, Swedes and Australians differ a lot in the amount of planning they put in behind a project. My respondents believe Swedes plan everything more carefully and in Sweden meetings are usually governed by an agenda, distributed before the meeting. The topics on the agenda are covered one by one and each topic has a prearranged time set for discussion. My respondents also said that this usually leaves little room for spontaneous discussions outside the agenda’s topics. They believe this is a way for Swedes to achieve efficiency and a way to be certain that all topics are being covered. However, a few of them also pointed out that there is a risk of inflexibility with this communication style. My respondents believe Australians are more flexible when using their time. Australians also have an agenda ready before a meeting, but the agenda acts more as a guide and the topics are usually not covered one after another. Instead the most important topics are discussed first in case there would not be time to cover them all.

Both Hall’s and Trompenaars’ theories deal with the time aspect. According to Hall, high-context cultures communicate time as something open and flexible, like in Australia, whereas in low-context cultures time is more organized, as in Sweden. According to Hall, low-context cultures concentrate on one thing at the time and they plan and schedule carefully, which correlate with my respondents’ descriptions of Swedes. How a culture structure time is also discussed in Trompenaars theory. According to him Swedes’ communication style is characterised by sequentialism (preference to do one thing at the time) whereas Australians’ communication style is characterised by synchronicalism (happy to do many things at the time).

Another difference my respondents mentioned was the profoundness of details communicated and used by Swedes and Australians in for example; a business presentation, rapport, or email. According to my respondents Swedes are more detail-oriented and expect presentations to be well prepared with supporting and relevant data, and proposals must be logically organized and backed up with a lot of technical facts and statistics. Australians on the other hand, also rely on technical facts and statistics, however; they tend to give out less information. According to my respondents, Australians seem to appreciate brevity and

124 Gudykunst (2003)
125 Mindess (1999)
126 Trompenaars (1996)
presentations should be kept simple. According to Hall’s theory these two communicative styles indicate that Sweden is a more lower-context culture compared with Australia.\textsuperscript{127}

Hall’s theory also concludes that low-context cultures have a more analytical approach whereas high-context cultures have a more intuitive approach.\textsuperscript{128} Swedes’ low-context communication style is partly displayed in their; strict planning, firm deadlines, and in their inflexibility to stray from the agenda’s topics, but it is also displayed in the importance Swedes add to double checking and comparing time, cost and convenience in all situations which also emphasize their analytical approach. According to my respondents Swedes are more inclined to double check and compare these aspects than Australians are according to my respondents who believe Australians have a more intuitive and flexible approach.

Finally, the last area my respondents brought up was how the concept of punctuality is communicated throughout the cultures. According to my respondents, Swedes definition of ‘being punctual’ means a few minutes before set time. Being punctual is regarded as a sign of respect and efficiency and Swedes will have little understanding for people who do not follow this rule. According to my respondents, a Swede believes him/her ‘being late’ as soon as the clock’s second hand passes the set time. Being late, especially for a prearranged business meeting is impolite, and is perceived as a sign of disrespect and disregard for the other person’s presence. If a Swede for any reason do run late it is absolutely crucial to phone and let the other person waiting know this. According to my respondents Australians define punctuality differently. ‘Being punctual’ in the Australian culture mean set time or a few minutes past the set time and ‘being late’ is somewhere around 5 minutes past. One of my respondents said;

“Australians are seldom on time. It really annoyed me at first, but now I’m just used to it.”

According to Hall, Swedes’ rigid deadlines and their punctuality indicate that they are a low-context culture, whereas Australians’ more flexible view of time indicates that they are from a higher-context culture.\textsuperscript{129} According to Gudykunst, communication occurs when a person attaches meaning to the information and communication does not necessarily equal understanding. According to him, effective communication is when individuals attach similar meanings to the message exchanged.\textsuperscript{130} In above case Swedes and Australians do not attach similar meaning to the word ‘punctuality’ and this can cause, as my quote above indicates, frustration.

\textsuperscript{127} Mindess (1999)
\textsuperscript{128} Mindess (1999)
\textsuperscript{129} Mindess (1999)
\textsuperscript{130} Gudykunst (2003)
5. FINAL DISCUSSION
Throughout this thesis it has been emphasised that when two people communicate they do not necessary talk about the exact same thing, because they are shaped by their cultural backgrounds, as well as their own individual. Gudykunst’s theory shows that it is easier to understand people from the same culture because they share the same national norms, values and believes. However, when people from different cultures communicating it is more likely that they talk across purpose and that they do not really understand what the other parts intentions are and what they really mean. This can cause misunderstandings and confusion, and in worst case, lead to communication failure. All my four scientists, mentioned in my theoretical chapter; Gudykunst, Hall, Hofstede, and Trompenaars, stress the importance of cultural understanding in order to achieve a successful communication in a cross-culture meeting.

5.1 Conclusion
The purpose of this thesis has been to investigate and analyse the presence of culture and communication differences between Swedes and Australians, based on four selected dimensions created by Hofstede and Trompenaars; Power distance, Masculinity verses Femininity, Affective verses Neutral, and Time. Recalling the introduction, my ambition has also been, along with my purpose, to provide a better understanding about conducting business in a cross-culture environment.

Sweden and Australia are geographically placed as far away from each other as they can get and one would think that people who live on each side of the world not have much in common. However, according to my study Swedes and Australians do have lots in common; however, they also have some main differences. Below the reader will find a summery of the most evident differences found in my study.

My first research area was to study if any ‘power distance’ differences could be found between Sweden and Australia, and if so, what impact these differences had on the cultures’ communication style. According to Hofstede’s research Swedes and Australians have a quite similar business structures. However, neither of my respondents agreed. According to them, Australian companies have a much larger power distance and this is displayed in a more hierarchical and assertive communication and leadership style. It also results in a more seniority and status oriented communication style, which is characterized by lots of delegation and protectiveness of territories, authority, and information flow in the company. Sweden’s low power distance, on the other hand, creates a more team-oriented, open and equal communication style, which is characterized by group discussions, personal responsibility, and a high flow of information among the employees.

My second research area was Hofstede’s ‘Masculinity verses Femininity’ dimension. Both Hofstede and my respondents agreed that Sweden is a feminine culture and Australia a more masculine. Swedes femininity is displayed in the equality between the genders, as well as in Swedes more cooperative communication style. In Sweden decisions are taken in groups after everyone have had their say. Australians masculinity, on the other hand, is displayed in their unilateral communication style. Differences between the cultures can also be found in how the manager’s role is communicated. In Australia the manager should have a decisive leadership style
and the manager usually make decisions single-handed. In Sweden the manager has a less visible role and everyone is usually allowed to participate in discussions.

My third research area was Trompenaars’ ‘Affective verses Neutral’ dimension. According to my respondents both Swedes and Australians have a direct and frank communication style; however, Swedes are characterized by a more neutral and reserved communication style compared to Australians more affective style. Swedes do not use a colourful language and they do not elaborate when communicating. They also try to avoid confrontations as much as possible and would much rather compromise to in order to settle a conflict. Australians, on the other hand, use a more colourful language. They are also more used to discuss disagreeing subjects and therefore are less inclined to compromise in conflicts.

My forth research area was Trompenaars’ ‘Time’ dimension. According to my respondents Swedes and Australians communicate and use their time differently. Swedes plan and schedule everything carefully and they present everything in fine details. Punctuality is also communicated to be extremely important throughout the Swedish culture. In Sweden meetings are governed by an agenda which is strictly followed, step by step. In Australia, on the other hand, the time aspect is more flexible communicated and Australians leave more room to stray from agenda topics. They also prefer brevity when it comes to details and punctuality is not as strictly followed.

By having identified cultural and communication differences between Swedes and Australians in this thesis, I hope that a better understanding is now provided for which can serve to make future communication between the two cultures less problematic.

5.2 Further research
With this thesis as a base, further studies could both deepen and broaden this knowledge about the Swedish and Australian culture in a number of directions. Sweden is an interesting culture to study because according to Hofstede’s dimensions scores it is either ranked among the first or the last countries on his five scales.

My research has focused on four of Hofstede’s and Trompenaars’ dimensions. As the aim of this thesis was rather broad my selected areas have just been touched upon and there are much more to explore. Both cultures consist of extended information in each area and therefore I would therefore give the reader the advice to concentrate on one single area if interested in continuing this research. The areas that I would like to recommend for further investigation is ‘power distance’ or ‘Masculinity verses Femininity’. These two dimensions were considered to have most evident differences according to my study.

My respondents were all Swedes working in Australia. It would be interesting to lead a complimentary study where Australians’ views were included, in order to see how they would reason and if the results would be the same. For example, interview Australians who work with Swedes in Australia or Australians who lives and work in Sweden.

Moreover, in this thesis a qualitative methodology was used, future research could perhaps instead be using a quantitative method; for example questionnaires sent out to a wide numbers of people to see if they would bring another insight on the problem.
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 Figures
Figure 1, Johanna Gustafsson (own creation)
Figure 2, Johanna Gustafsson (own creation)
Figure 3, Johanna Gustafsson (own creation)
Figure 4, Johanna Gustafsson (own creation)

 Appendix
1. Map of Australia
2. STC Power Point Presentation slides; slide 3, 13, 31
3. Interview guide
4. The rest of Geert Hofstede’s other national culture dimensions
5. The rest of Fons Trompenaar’s other business culture dimensions
APPENDIX 2

LARGE SURFACE AREA & CONCENTRATED BUSINESS
– Australians live mainly on the east coast and in the larger cities

- The surface area is almost as big as USA
  - 17 times bigger than Sweden
  - Six states and two Territories
- 20.9 million inhabitants, the population is concentrated to the larger cities and the east coast
  - 60% lives in the state capitols
  - 80% lives in the eastern states, Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria
- Located between the 10th and 45th latitude
- Multi cultural society with population mainly from UK and Ireland, central Europe and Asia

LIVING IN AUSTRALIA
- There is an extensive Swedish network in Australia

Australia has the world’s best life quality according to many surveys*
- A lot of people choose to live or migrate to Australia and almost 25% of the current population is born overseas
- Many come to live and work in Australia for shorter periods in their life and are open to new contacts
- Over 8000 Swedish born people reside in Australia

Swedish organisations provide a meeting point for the Swedish community
- Swedish-Australian Chamber of Commerce (SACC) is a forum to exchange business ideas, experiences and, ultimately, products and services. SACC also organises social activities such as quarterly drinks and celebration of Swedish anniversaries and holidays.
- The Young Professionals (YP) is a subdivision of SACC and a meeting point for the young members. It organises seminars, social gatherings and is a link to the Swedish-Australian business community. The YP is open for both students and graduates.
- Swedish Church – Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney
- Other regional Swedish organisations in the major cities that provides a social platform for newly arrived Swedes

* Institute for Management Development, Lausanne, Schweiz
APPENDIX 3

INTERVIEW GUIDE

- Business communication and culture differences between Swedes and Australians

  Power & Hierarchy

  Values & Norms

  Verbal & Non-verbal Communication

  Genders

What Power and Hierarchy differences have you noticed between Sweden and Australia?
(Management levels, Management types, Employees’ relation to superiors, Group/Individual oriented, Negotiation authority, Decision making process, Titles, Status, Salary gaps, Delegation etc)

What differences, in values and norms, have you noticed between Sweden and Australia?
(Business etiquettes, Distinction between private life and work life, Preferential treatments, Amount of rules, Time commitments, Small talk before a meeting, Planning, Handling of disagreeing subjects, Confrontation/Consensus etc)

What verbal and non-verbal communication differences have you noticed between Swedes and Australians?
(Display of emotions, Implicit/Explicit communication, Detailed oriented/Brief, Clothing, Body language, Personal space etc)

What gender differences have you noticed between Sweden and Australia?
(Masculine & Feminine roles, Distribution of roles, Equality of genders, Salary gaps etc)

What do you think characterize Swedes?

What you think characterize Australians?
APPENDIX 4

The rest of Geert Hofstede’s National Culture Model

Collectivism verses Individualism (IDV)

Hofstede’s ‘Collectivism verses Individualism’ dimension relates to the degree to which people in a culture prefer to act as members of a group or as individuals. It also reflects whether the group’s interests are most important or the individual person’s. On this dimension Sweden scored 71 and Australia 90.

In collectivistic cultures people belong to groups which they have been integrated into from birth onwards. The group is the most important thing and that reflects also the work environment. Group goals and norms outweigh personal goals and employees’ dependence is stressed. In collectivistic cultures it is important for the employees to have a job that supply them with training opportunities which can improve their skills. In these cultures employees strive for a good title and special treatments are encouraged as they give people status and power within the culture.

Collectivistic companies employ not only an individual but also a person; belonging to a group. It is not unusual that the person is a relative of the manager or of one of the employees. To recruit relatives or friends is a good way to reduce the uncertainty about the people hired. The group is looking after the employee so that he or she will not embarrass the rest of the employees, which usually consists of other relatives. Employees who embarrass themselves not just loose their face; they embarrass the whole group; their extended family and friends. Poorly done work is no reason to dismiss anyone in a collectivistic culture. That would be the same thing as dismissing one’s child. Instead of getting fired the employee would get relocated or transferred to another area that requires less skilled tasks.

Also the relationship between the company and its customers differ between a collectivistic and individualistic culture. In a collectivistic culture the negotiation decision process is long. A relationship first need to be built up and not until a common trust has been established can the people conduct business with each other. This relationship can take years building up, but once it has been established both parties try their utmost to maintain it. Personal relationship is more important than the task when doing business in collectivistic cultures and this can make it

131 http://feweb.uvt.nl/center/hofstede/page3.htm
difficult for competitive companies to get a foot in, even when they offer a better price, product or service.

On the individualistic side the ties between individuals are loose and people look after themselves and their immediate family only. Employees are independent and the identity is connected with the individual person rather than to the family or group the employee belongs to. In an individualistic culture people make business with a company rather than with a person and the employees are viewed as individuals with own interests and needs. Individualists value their freedom to make own decisions, and it is important to have a challenging job in which they can adopt their own approach.

In a strong individualistic culture, it is inappropriate to hire a family member or a relative. Some companies even have a practice of not allowing marriage couples to work in the same company. Employees who do a bad job get fired and employees who perform well get bonuses. These bonuses are paid to single individuals instead of to the whole group.

The relationship between the company and its customers is based on equal treatment. Preferential treatment is considered unethical and bad business practice and no customer should be treated better than another. In individualistic cultures only a short small talk is needed before getting down to business. The business is much more important than the relationship. To get a good deal and profit is at the end of the day what really counts.  

**Uncertainty avoidance (UAI)**
Hofstede’s ‘Uncertainty avoidance’ dimension relates to the extent to which cultures establish rules to avoid ambiguity and uncertainty. On this dimension Sweden scored 29 and Australia 51.

![Figure 4](https://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_dimensions.php)

**Figure 4. Sweden’s and Australia’s ‘Uncertainty avoidance’ dimension indexes.** Above figure is an own creation by Johanna Gustafsson, based on Hofstede’s research scores.

In cultures with high uncertainty avoidance employees feel uncomfortable and threatened in unstructured and unknown situations. There is an emotional need for written and unwritten rules, regulations and laws controlling and governing employers’ and employees’ rights, duties, and obligations. To suddenly remove these laws would cause confusion and concern because employees in such cultures are brought up and programmed to live in a well-structured society. As little as possible should be left to chance and this has created many irrational, inconsistent and

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133 Hofstede (1991)
134 [http://www.geert-hofstede.com](http://www.geert-hofstede.com)
non-functional laws and rules. But these laws still serve their purpose as they provide security to the employees’ emotional need for structure. Without these rules the employees’ would get stressed and nervous when finding themself in unpredictable situations.

Employees in weak uncertainty avoidance cultures however do not feel as threatened by unpredictable situations. They accept risks to a greater extent and they adapt easier to changeable situations. Instead employees from weak uncertainty avoidance companies seem to have an emotional fear of formal rules and laws. Rules should only be created when necessary and employees take pride in order to solve problems without formal rules.

Employees in companies with high uncertainty avoidance have a strong body language and it is socially acceptable to raise one’s voice to show emotion. Employees in weak uncertainty avoidance companies are instead known for keeping a low profile while communicating and they have been taught not to express emotions in public. The more anxious the culture is the more expressive it tends to be.

The working moral is high in strong uncertainty avoidance cultures and punctuality and precision are high priorities. The working motto is “Time is money”. Employees from weak uncertainty avoidance companies can work just as hard if needed but they prefer to take it easy. To them time is viewed as a framework and does not need to be monitored at all times.

A culture with weak uncertainty avoidance stimulates fundamental innovations easier because the tolerance towards dissenting ideas are bigger, but on the other hand it is more difficult to develop innovations and realize them in these cultures since they require accuracy with details and punctuality and these character traits are mostly possessed by employees from strong uncertainty avoidance cultures. One can therefore say that it is generally people from weak uncertainty avoidance cultures who come up with ideas and innovation while it is people from strong uncertainty avoidance cultures who develop and implement the ideas.  

Long-term orientation verses Short-term (LTO)
Hofstede’s ‘Long-term orientation versus Short-term’ dimension deals with the time aspect and cultures’ attitudes towards the past, present and the future. On this dimension Sweden scored 33 and Australia 31.

![Figure 5](image)

*Figure 5. Sweden’s and Australia’s ‘Long-term orientation versus Short-term’ dimension indexes. Above figure is an own creation by Johanna Gustafsson, based on Hofstede’s research scores.*

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136 Hofstede (1991)
137 Hofstede (2005)
Long-term orientation cultures have a dynamic attitude towards the future and employees value future rewards, savings and perseverance. Short-term cultures have a more static attitude towards the past and present and the employees value corporate traditions and the fulfilling of social and corporate obligations, personal stability and peace.

In long-term cultures family companies are common. The working environment has a stable hierarchy which makes it easier for new companies to set up business in the country. This can affect the entrepreneur market negatively, since the people do not stress initiative and risk taking in these cultures.

Short-term companies the employees focus on the last month, quarter or last year’s result. Their control systems are based on this short period and their managers are being judged by the last year’s results. In long-term companies employees aim for future goals and these are often set 5-10 years ahead.  

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Hofstede (2005)
APPENDIX 5

The rest of Fons Trompenaar’s Business Cultural Model

Universalism verses Particularism - are rules or relationships most important?
Trompenaars’ ‘Universalism verses Particularism’ dimension deals with whether rules or relationships control people’s behaviour. Employees from universalistic cultures prioritize rules, codes and standards over friends and relatives’ needs and claims. In universalistic cultures everybody falls under the same rule and should be treated the same. Exceptions weaken the rule.

In particularistic cultures the ideal company focuses on friendships and relationships. These cultures also have rules and laws, but they are mainly there to make it possible for employees to make exceptions for particular cases and people. Friends and relatives should be treated favourably and should be protected no matter what the rules say. While a universalist is concerned to follow rules in life and at work, a particularist is more concerned about the needs of people closest to them are being fulfilled. 139

Clashes can easily occur when employees from both cultures need to conduct business with each other. A universalist would say of particularists, "they can not be trusted because they will always help their friends", and a particularist would say of universalists, "you can not trust them; they would not even help a friend". 140

Individualism verse Communitarianism – the group or the individual most important?
Trompenaars’ ‘Individualism verses Communitarianism’ dimension deals with whether we function in a group or as an individual. In individualistic cultures people place the individual ahead of the culture, or the employee ahead of the company. People look after themselves and their immediate family only. Employees are expected to make their own decisions and take responsibility for their own actions. In communitarian cultures people place the culture ahead of the individual, or the company ahead of the individual. In business situations employees must act in a way that serves the company and by doing so the individual will be taken care of naturally by the company and its employees. 141

I find this dimension very similar to Hofstede's Individualism verses Collectivism dimension and will therefore not explain it further.

Specific verses Diffuse – How far do we get involved?
Trompenaars’ ‘Specific verses Diffuse’ dimension deals with the degree to which people engage others in specific areas of their lives, or diffusely in all areas. It distinguishes people who have a

139 Hampden-Turner and Fons Trompenaars (2000)
140 http://www.brefigroup.co.uk/newsletters/november_2003_3.html
141 Trompenaars (1996)
People from diffuse cultures are cautious and careful when making new friends. In diffuse cultures acquaintanceship is the norm and a close friendship an exception. It takes a long time for a diffuse person to open up to another person, but when that point is reached the friend has access to all areas of the other person’s life. Whilst accepted into a diffuse person’s life, one will be invited to not only friends- and work gatherings, but also family events and other private occasions. In these cultures there is a no clear distinction between work and private life. Qualities valued by diffuse cultures are trust, understanding and ambiance.

In specific cultures people are immediately friendly and welcoming to new people. However, they only engage people in specific areas of their lives. People’s work life is separated from its sports life, which is separated from its family life and so forth. There is a clear separation line between private life and work life and people in specific cultures do not expect their colleagues to be a part of their lives outside work. In specific cultures managers have power over the employees only when at work. In diffuse cultures the employees refer to the manager even if meeting him/her on a golf course. Diffuse companies tend to have a lower turnover and employee mobility because of their loyalty and their multiple human bonds. They tend not to headhunt or lure away employees from other companies with high salaries.

People in specific cultures work differently from people in diffuse cultures. In diffuse oriented cultures they start with the whole and then they analyse each element in perspective of the total. All elements are related to each other and the relationships are more important than each separate element. The whole is more than just the sum of its elements. The opposite goes for people from specific cultures. They start to analyse the elements separately and then put them together. The whole is the sum of its parts.

**Achievement verses Ascription**

– Do we have to prove ourselves to receive status or is it given to us?

Trompenaars’ ‘Achievement verses Ascription’ dimension deals with who cultures accord status to people. Is it based on their achievements or on who the person is? In achievement cultures status derives from what the employees have achieved and accomplished at work. To keep their status the employees continuously need to prove themselves. In ascribed cultures employees’ status relates to who they are. This can derive from; birth, age, gender, education, class, families’ reputation and so forth. Employees in ascribed companies do not need to keep on achieving things or in other ways prove themselves to retain their status.

Clashes can occur when achievement-oriented companies communicating with ascription-oriented companies. For example when western achievement-oriented companies send young, promising managers on challenging assignments to ascription-oriented cultures without realising that the local culture will not accept youthfulness, even how good the employee might be.

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143 Trompenaars (1996)
145 [http://www.7d-culture.com/Content/dim_3.htm](http://www.7d-culture.com/Content/dim_3.htm)
146 Trompenaars (1996)
Internal verses External – Do we control our environment or work with it?

Tropenaars’ ‘Internal verses External’ dimension has to do with how cultures have developed their attitudes towards the environment. The way people relate to the environment is linked to the way they try to control their lives. Trompenaars found two major orientations towards nature during his research; Internalistic cultures and Externalistic cultures.

Internalistic cultures view nature as a machine that can be controlled with the right expertise. The people do not believe in predestination and luck. They believe that you can dominate nature if you make an effort. Externalistic people do not believe that they can shape their own destiny; nature is a mystery and you never know what will happen to you.

In internalistic cultures it is more important to control the nature rather than to understand or recreate its harmonies. The opposite is true in externalistic cultures. Differences between the two cultures are often reflected in international companies. While employees from internalistic cultures try hard to avoid confrontations and create techniques to maintain harmony, employees from externalistic cultures are used to disagreements and believe the best way to handle a difficult situation is to have an open discussion about it as soon as it pops up. 147

147 Tropenaars (1996)