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How Swedish and Polish Organizational Cultures Merge. A Study of Cross-cultural Management

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1. Introduction

During the last decade the competitiveness of developing countries has increased by offering low costs and relatively low risks. For some time Western European companies have been caught in a trend in which their production facilities, earlier often located in Eastern and Central Europe, are moved to more cost effective locations outside of Europe. Poland is one of those countries that could potentially be affected by this trend. With that said, as the Polish economy grows, the relationship and attitude towards foreign direct investment should be emphasized.

Sweden has since even before the fall of the Soviet Union been a constant actor investing private capital into the Polish economy. Despite the above mentioned trend it seems as if though Swedish companies, due to the lower risks involved and the relative closeness to their end customer, decide to either keep, or move their facilities back to Europe[1]. There is a pronounced interest from Swedish companies towards the existing potential in Poland (Tollgreth-Andersson, 2006). Between 2009 and 2011 Swedish direct investments to Poland average 3, 17% of its total foreign investments[2].

– Could increased knowledge of the advantages linked to the result of positive interaction between Swedish and Polish corporate culture and management provide an incentive for Swedish companies to invest more into Poland?
– What are the obstacles and opportunities facing managers in a cross-cultural setting and how can they be used to enhance company efficiency?

This paper does not aim to find a one "best" way of incorporating numerous corporate cultures. We live in a time where research with the goal of establishing a "best business strategy" is seen as an anachronistic attempt to cure the combined contingencies of our world with one prescription. The business context of today is a constantly changing, dynamic and challenging arena, where one best strategy or structure will not suffice (Trompenaars, 2012). There is no "rational model" for management (Peters and Waterman, 1982), what this paper does intend, is to illuminate the importance of corporate culture, the imperative of communication between managers, executives, team managers and operational workers from all

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[1] As stated by D. Larsson country manager at the Swedish trade council in Warsaw.
[2] Report: Swedish foreign trade and direct investments published by the National Board of Trade Q12012.

the cultures represented in the company, throughout all layers of the hierarchy in order to incorporate the most effective (positive) practices of both cultures. Further it aims to emphasize the importance of challenging the psychological phenomena of ethnocentrism as leaders and managers in order to become more adaptable to the challenges of our environment. This is a study on cross-cultural management and it poses the question: Is it possible to create incentives for Swedish business owners to invest in Poland under the pretext that the Polish corporate culture can teach Swedish management something that would benefit their company? Is there a way to take advantage of the two corporate cultures that exist, capitalizing on the positive behaviors of both? And finally what is created as two cultures interact?

This research takes a pragmatic approach, aimed at determining advantageous, as well as disadvantageous factors and behaviors that can help to facilitate the process of cooperation, through mutual understanding, between Swedish and Polish employees.

The first part of this paper is dedicated to the definition and explanation of the concepts applied in the article. By correct understanding of the underlying concepts, we can reach more accurate conclusions. First and foremost it is important to understand how national culture influences organizational culture and the management practices of companies. After explaining the relationship between national and corporate culture the paper will proceed to examine of the cultural dimensions presented by Hofstede, focusing on the results connected to Polish and Swedish business practices and management style. This is followed by further going into the specific cultural aspects of the Swedish, followed by Polish management practices, with a certain emphasis on how and why they have developed as they have over time. The analysis will focus on the interaction between the two corporate cultures and the possible creation of a "third culture" as well as reaching conclusions as how to use this as a competitive advantage. It should be said that this paper does not aim at giving a "best" solution for companies operating in Poland. Instead it should be seen as a tool to encourage mutual understanding, and its importance to corporate culture and business performance, as well as a gateway for further research.

2. Methodology

To be able to address the questions posed in the previous chapter a qualitative approach has been used. The findings of the article are based on fourteen face-to-face, semi-structured and in-depth interviews with business owners and managers of six Swedish companies in Poland. Nine out of the

fourteen interviewed are Polish nationals, five are Swedish. Interviews were initiated by giving the respondent time to answer a short questionnaire including both closed and open ended questions as well as a part where the responded had to put their answers on a scale from 1–5 (1 signifying I do not agree with the statement and 5 – I agree fully). It is complemented by one case study of a Swedish telecommunications company present on the Polish market since 1992. The companies do not represent one industry, although a tendency towards the service sector should be acknowledged before interpreting the results. Two of the six companies are considered large, employing more than 800 employees, while the four remaining are small firms with number of employees ranging from fifteen to forty-five. A majority of the companies have been present on the polish market since the nineties, with two being set up between 2006 and 2008. Eight in-depth interviews were conducted with owners and top managers, while seven interviews with middle and lower level managers. Two additional interviews have been conducted with persons who are not directly involved as business owners but having acquired expertise through continuous interaction with Swedish business owners in Poland over a longer period of time. These include the general advisor to the Swedish Ambassador in Warsaw, Gunnar Haglund, who has had a considerable experience working in Poland and advising Swedish business owners on their polish activities, especially energy related businesses. The second expert is the head of the Swedish Export council in Warsaw, Daniel Larsson to whom I am especially grateful and who has provided me with valuable inputs during the beginning of my research as well as put me in contact with Swedish companies in Poland.

The literary review conducted for this article is trying to incorporate existing academic theory, prior research and case studies into the focus on this article and will be used to enforce the outcomes of the interviews, observations and case study done in relation to this study.

This study is in its core a study of organizational culture, but in order to be of practical use in a business context, there is a need of relating the concept of organizational culture to the one of company performance. To do this two relationships have to be established: One, the link between national and corporate culture and two, the link between corporate culture and company performance.

3. Literature review

In the early eighties the focus on Swedish-Polish business relations started to inspire academic attention. Since then there have been several publication on how the Swedish and Polish culture interact in the workplace. Most of these

have focused on how Swedish companies are managed in Poland (Bachnik, 2010; Larsson and Nilsson, 2004; Kahlin and Piechal, 2006; Kostera, 1990; Johansson, 2004; Silvandersson, 2006). Many of these have discussed the differences in working culture between the two countries and how management can lead to misinterpretations and conflicts if not prepared to understand the foundation of these differences. What this paper aims to show it that these differences have to be integrated in order for successful cooperation.

These academic works have been based on theoretical research, multiple in-depth interviews and case studies. Tollgerdt-Andersson (1996) has conducted research on Swedish leadership in Europe and is emphasizing the importance of mutual understanding of the cultural differences in order to incorporate successful cross-cultural leadership and to increase company competitiveness.

I am especially thankful to Dr Monika Kostera for her PhD dissertation *Szwedzki styl zarządzania – przejawy, uwarunkowania, możliwe kierunki rozwoju* (1989) which has shed light on the theoretical aspect of this article, as well as the interesting business context that prevailed in Poland just before the fall of the Soviet Union.

Today, Polish companies operate in a business context that looks completely different than it did two decades ago (Blazyca, in: Bateman, 1997). Swedish companies coming to Poland today are coming for other reasons than they did in the beginning of the nineties. No longer is Poland attracting foreign firms only because of their low labor costs or market growth, today Poland is offering a strategic geographical position, skilled labor and a stable political and economic climate.

Before diving into the concept of organizational culture it can be useful to provide a shared definition of national culture, as this is the core of the corporate culture. By knowing the origin of our own and others behavior we can become more understanding and accepting of the behavior itself (Hofstede, 2005).

National culture is developed throughout our lives, with an emphasis on the surroundings to which one is born. It is the common history, religion, traditions and habits that are shares by people in their social surrounding (Lewis, 2008). It is developed through the incorporation of beliefs, ethics and values and the interaction with others who share similar beliefs (Hofstede, 2005; Trompenaars, 2012). The result is a unique culture which varies from country to country, from nationality to nationality (Tollgreth-Andersson, 1996) or from religion to religion (in those regions where religion is the dominant factor bringing people together). These experiences teach humans how to behave in different situations hence, influences the behavior expressed in the workplace, which in effect influences the corporate culture of the employer (Morgan, 2006; Trompenaars, 1998). "Culture

is the way in which a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas" (Schein, 1985). In this view every working citizen is contributing actively in development of a specific corporate culture. The extent to which employees can influence the culture of their company is in turn determined by the company's openness to communication, hierarchy and its rules and regulations. Several scholars have shown how national cultures affect the leadership of managers (Tollgerdt-Andersson, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1993; Hofstede, 1980, 2005; Ayal, 1989; Skapinker, 1989; Naulleau and Harper, 1993; Lane, 1989; the GLOBE research 2004).

In *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the mind* (2005) Geert Hofstede defines culture as the "collective programming of the mind". Acknowledging that there lies some truth in this statement the problem we are faced with is the reality that culture is for the most part unconscious. Cultural behavior is not something usually discussed during a regular day, unless exposed to another culture, in which case the attention is usually turned to confront the behavior of the other person. "The essence of culture is not what is visible on the surface. It is the shared ways in which groups of people understand and interpret the world" (Trompenaars and Turner 1998, 2012). Since people are not fully aware of the cultural aspects of their behavior, while at the same time unaware that others might be behaving and thinking differently, conflicts might arise. Hence, if an organizational structure reflect a national culture, it is clear that as companies establish subsidiaries outside of their home country there might occur cultural conflicts between the employees which are of the "receiving" culture, and the corporate culture which reflect the "home country" of the company. Sending expatriates abroad to set up operations does of course imply that the company aims to impose certain cultural values in order to make the subsidiary conform to the international standards of the organization. But implementation requires negotiation, and this negotiation is more likely to succeed when the parties concerned understand the reasons for the differences in viewpoints (Hofstede, 2005).

If managers do not try to negotiate or understand the culture of the "receivers" conflicts are bound to arise (Hofstede, 2005, Lewis, 2008, Trompenaars, 2012). Conflicts in the company are costly (Askanas, 2012). Intrapersonal conflicts creates oppositions unofficial coalitions (Morgan, 2006, Kozminski, 2008) which lead to lower productivity, higher turnover and a less innovative and creative environment (Askanas, 2012).

But, this phenomenon can be prevented through the understanding of culture and its crucial role in the process of setting up a foreign subsidiary. By establishing a system in which the confronting cultures can be merged into one

unique corporate culture provides a unique competitive advantage as well as higher company performance (Rodriguez, 2005).

The second relationship that needs to be established is the one between corporate structure and company performance. As stated by Kotter and Heskett (1992, p. 21) "there is a positive correlation between corporate culture and long-term economic growth". Their study focuses the performance of American companies with either *strong* or *weak* corporate cultures, where strong is defined as an authoritarian culture. The study results in the establishment of a relationship between corporate culture and performance. They show that not always does a "strong" corporate culture correspond to good economic performance. In addition, some companies, such as P&G, General Motors, Goodyear, Citicorp which have acknowledged *strong* cultures (strong is defined by Kotter and Heskett as an authoritarian culture) show comparably weak performance in comparison to other less authoritarian corporations (Kotter and Heskett, 1992).

Finally to understand the challenges of cross-cultural management it is imperative of addressing the psychological phenomena of ethnocentrism.

Ethnocentrism, the belief that one's national culture is superior to others will, in many cases when articulated, lead to conflicts (Kostera, 1990; Lewis, 2008). In itself ethnocentrism is a natural reaction of humans when interacting with others of another culture. The interpretation of another's actions is based on earlier experiences (Hofstede, 2005). But if incoming managers believe their culture *superior* to the one they manage, their ability to understand, communicate and compromise with the employees will be limited (Tollgreth-Andersson, 1996; Hofstede, 2005). If not understood correctly managers face the risk of creating passive or/and outspoken resistance from the employees. In cross-cultural management, for years expatriates were used to manage foreign subsidiaries and branches and it is still a common practice today. It is imperative to understand the effect that ethnocentrism can have on the management and long-term success and profitability of a company.

3.1. The Swedish organizational culture

3.1.1. "Management was an act of compromise" (Byrkjeflot, 2003)

Historically Sweden has been perceived as an individualist society, while the contrary have been said about the Polish with the solidarity movement as a flagship for this vision. It has been found that quite the opposite is true when it comes to the business culture of the two countries. Holmberg and Åkerblom (1998) published a study, based on Hofstede's earlier research on individualist versus collectivist societies and reached the conclusion that emphasis must be

put on the specific situation when we apply a certain behavior. The study show that Swedes, might be individualistic in terms of family affaires, and keeping their private life private, but as it comes to work related, as well as social undertakings Swedes behaving in a collectivistic manner (Holmberg and Åkerblom, 1998; Kostera, 1989, Trompenaars, 2012). This means that in a work situation Swedes are more likely to concentrate on the wellbeing and the success of the work team than on their own success.

After the Second World War there was a strong movement all over Western Europe, a belief in the social human development. In Scandinavia the concept of free markets was at this time still quite novel. Leaders in Sweden, instead of following the American way, wanted to use the situation on the markets to encourage the development of a welfare state. The creation of the social democrats in 1928 by Per Albin Hanson was a way to try to find a compromise between democracy and capitalism (Byrkjeflot, 2003, Edström and Jönsson both in Czarniawska and Sevón, 2003). Instead of opposing private ownership a new form of *functional socialism* was created (Byrkjeflot in: Czarniawska and Sevón, 2003). If anyone wants to understand the Swedish mentality they first have to understand the underlying values that created this welfare state. The motivation that forced the change of the Nordic societies to social democracy was to encourage cooperation by citizens over the country's economic resources. The idea was that if anyone, from any background had the education and opportunity to build a profitable company this would eventually make way for economic growth and well being for the whole society. A precondition for this was that everybody in the society had to have the social possibility to do this, "workers must be emancipated from social insecurity before they can partake effectively in economic democracy" (Esping-Andersen, 1985, p. 22). Byrkjeflot speaks in his paper *Nordic Management: from functional socialism to shareholder value* (in: Czarniawska and Sevon et al., 2003) of a management style which he attributes to the effort of combining economic growth with democratic stability: "A program for increased equality and extensive democratization of society" (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2003, p. 17). Czarniawska (2003) describes the Swedish manager as a representative of the community who seek compromise among conflicting interests in the workplace.

After the oil crisis in the late seventies Swedish companies had to find a new strategy to keep attracting customers. A new way of management was introduced in which the focus was directed towards the customer, which eventually resulted in the service oriented economy which Sweden has today (Edström and Jönsson, 2003) and a focus on team working (Kostera, 1989).

Swedes were perceived as founders of a new way of management, a way which emphasized group-work, democracy and responsibility taking as well as

advanced far-reaching social responsibility for the welfare state. In the 1980's, when the backlash of Fordism was striking America with increasing health problems and high turnover, Swedish management received great momentum.

Today the Swedish way is all about meeting the demands of the international market. As the small economy it is, it relies heavily on being on ahead of the development and trends (Tollgreth-Andersson, 1996). Sweden is aware of the increasingly high competitiveness on the global market and the need for its economy to stay flexible to meet the demands of the global economy. For the Swedish economy it is important to have the knowledge and understanding of what other attitudes, values and demands that are present on the most important export markets" (Tollgerdt-Andersson, 1996).

Kostera (1990) states that Swedes tend to be of a serious nature and draw a clear line between work and private relationships, which has more recently been enforced by Bachnik (2010). Through the dimension of emotional distance, Kostera presents Swedes as inward looking and less open to show emotions than Poles are in the work place. Lewin (2008) supports this and advises non-Swedes not to show rash emotions in the workplace, which would be considered inappropriate. Only by spending much time around a Swede at the workplace it there a chance of finally breaking through their "emotional barrier" after which you have a friend for life. This unwillingness to show emotion can lead to the avoidance of conflicts (Källström, 1995). In general it is very hard to get rid of Swedish employees due to strong unions and legislations (Bachnik, 2010). It means that business owners and managers prefer not to stir conflict and thereby creating an unpleasant working environment. Conflicts are therefore avoided until no longer possible to circumvent.

Swedish managers, even in comparison to other corporate cultures a have a very high opinion of themselves (Kostera, 1990, Källström, 1995, Lewis, 2008), which is contradictory to the general opinion of Swedes being very humble and egalitarian in their presentation of themselves (Bachnik, 2010) as well as the national avoidance of articulating any belief of one's own greatness, something that from the early childhood is seen as extremely impertinent.

One of the most outstanding features if we look to Hofstede's cultural dimensions is for the Swedish culture of consensus. In a law ratified in 1976, it is decided that everyone in the workplace has the right to be a part of the decision making of the firm. This consensus process and its influence on decision making is one of the distinctive features of Swedish management (Bachnik, 2010, Kostera, 1990). Edström and Jönsson (2003) state that the Swedish way of delegating responsibility, while giving quite unclear instructions, is a strategy which teaches employees to become future leaders to through creating their

own solutions, better than strict guidelines would do. But this ambiguous way of giving orders works only in settings where everyone has the same understanding of the goals to be fulfilled, which requires employees to align their own goals to the goals of the company (Edström and Jönsson, 2003). Weaknesses in the Swedish corporate culture are (Moran in: Lewis 2008, Källström 1995): Conflict avoidance, ambiguity, fear of confrontation and reliance on the team for initiatives and in Edström and Jönsson (Czarniawska and Sköldberg, 1998) the question is asked: Is the Swedish style of leadership competitive?

3.2. The Polish organizational culture

As concluded from the definitions of culture, the historical element is significant in the development of a nations culture, and therefore also in the development of the corporate culture. Though experiencing significant periods of greatness, one of which might be happening at his very moment, Poland has through the last five hundred years been fighting a constant battle over preserving its own nationality. This has quite understandably resulted in a strong sense of patriotism, there exists a defensive nationalism (Lewis, 2008) which it articulated as a strong national pride which is important to be aware of when coming to Poland for work.

To understand the development of Polish business culture we first have to acknowledge the fact that it was only in the early nineties that the modern notions and principles of business practices were introduced to the Polish stakeholders. To understand this it seems appropriate to look closer at the concept of management in transition economies. Kozminski (2008) state that the manager under the communist regime was bound by law to first abide to the rules and interests of the party, before caring for the interest of the "business" (or rather the state owned entity). The Soviet Block, despite having a rich and varied cultural history before the entrance of communism, the time of strict regulation linked politics and culture closely together. Living under the Stalinist regime forced people to develop their own techniques for survival. Away from the prying eyes of communistic managers, a work culture of avoiding direct criticism, of working around the regulations and restrictions and "manipulating the information output" (Kozminski, 2008, p. 116) was created. Lewis (2008) also point out that there exists distrust between employees and managers in Poland, showing that a foreign manager has to earn the trust, in order not to create oppositions. Despite Polish employees being quick to criticize in private, there exists a preference from Polish employees for authoritarian leadership (Kozminski, 2008). It is crucial for managers coming from abroad to understand

this underlying aspect of the Polish history which is the base in which silent oppositions and coalitions might be formed if they feel threatened on their territory.

While many Poles have a natural aversion towards anything interpreted as communistic, the Swedish social democratic structure does not seem to influence the polish manager's positive idea of Swedish management. Bachnik (2010) shows that 36,6% of the asked managers in Poland believe the Scandinavian management style to be better than the Polish one, in contrast to only 5,6% stating that the Polish management style is better. The main reasons (which are divided into country specifics) seem to be in Sweden, the innovation and creativity in Swedish companies, less bureaucratic and focus on the individual.

Despite the previous lack western management know-how Poland has since the fall of the Soviet Union experienced a continuous inflow of managers from all around the world coming with different organizational influences. This implies that Poland, instead of having one national business culture, will for some time have multiple business cultures (Blazyca, 1996) and if analyzed correctly, it has the power to pick and choose elements which are beneficial and enable long term growth.

3.3. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Due to the extensive research supporting it, as well as the way in which ensuing scholars that have used it for further research, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions provide a generally accepted way to distinguish differences in cultures and to point out differences in corporate cultures worldwide. In this text they will be used as a platform to guide the analysis of how culturally founded behavior might result in misunderstandings and other conflicts in the workplace.

Table 1. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions[3]

	Poland	Sweden
1. Power Distance	68	31
2. Individualism	60	71
3. Masculinity	64	5
4. Uncertainty avoidance	93	29
5. Long term orientation	32	33

Source: Hofstede (2005).

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[3] The full rankings can be found in G. Hofstede *Cultures and Organizations Software of the mind* (2005).

By looking at table 1 it is possible to determine certain differences in the corporate cultures of Poland and Sweden. The scores in Power Distance shows a variation of 37 (Poland scores 68 and Sweden 31) implying that in Poland, the *dependence relationship* to superiors is significantly higher than in Sweden. The lower the number, the less dependent subordinates are, there more interdependent superiors and employees are, thus more open to communication and cooperation establishing a mutually consultative relationship (Källström, 1998). Other aspects of a country with low power distance are decentralization of decision making and low emotional distance opening up communication between layers of the hierarchy. As a country scores higher, as Poland in this case, it tells us that an authoritarian superior is preferred, establishing a *counter dependant* relationship between employee and manager, this is enforced by Aleksandrowicz in 1992 (in Kozminski, 2008). When this power distance is large, the score high, we cannot expect employees to approach nor contradict their superiors directly. Instead, if discontent exists in the workplace, employees will carry out a sort of shadowed discontent, avoiding open conflict, a strategy which has been frequently used as a tool during the communistic management (Kozminski, 2008). This can be highly disruptive to the daily operations of a company. It creates a silent opposition towards integration which prevents the creation of employee identification with the company; something that we will come to see is of great importance in Swedish companies.

The individuality index shows us to what degree employees are expected to organize their individual work, and the extent to which the individual interests are stronger than the group (Källström, 1998). Comparing the scores of Hofstede's Individualism versus Collectivism (Trompenaars has a similar dimension is his "orientation to the person versus orientation to the task") we are basically focusing on the question whether employees feel as a separate individual from other employees ("I") or as a member of a group ("we") (Hofstede, 2005). When we look to the Swedish corporate structure, this individualistic notion can be noticed in the emphasis on personal development and personal goal setting within the company for each employee. It is also important as an employer to offer training and development for employees. In the extreme case of collectivism, such as most south American countries according to Hofstede there is no such thing as a personal opinion, rather opinions are "predetermined by the group" (Hofstede, 2005, p. 87). This is put in contrast to the individualist society where it is desirable to express an opinion. Collectivism: *"A society in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty"*. But as seen in the comparison, Sweden and Poland are not far from each other in

this index and as there is a strong correlation between the growth and wealth of nation and individualism it is probable that the gap will narrow as Poland growth economically.

In the dimension of masculinity versus femininity Sweden and Poland show big differences according to Hofstede. Sweden is ranked last of all the countries, meaning that Sweden has the most feminine culture of all the respondents. A society where feminine values are prevail workers emphasize the importance of having a good working relationship with your superior, having good colleagues, being able to live in a good area and having employment security (Hofstede, 2005) this is emphasized by Tollgerdt-Andersson (1996). This, in contrast to a masculine society which emphasizes income, formal recognition for the job you perform, advancement and having challenge in your work. This dimension is a good indicator on what the motivational factors consist of for employees coming from either Sweden or Poland. According to Hofstede countries which are scoring higher in masculinity are relatively more competitive within manufacturing companies, while feminine cultures are more competitive in service economies (Källström, 1998).

Uncertainty avoidance can be defined by how countries differ in their tolerance towards the ambiguous and unpredictable (Hofstede, 2005). Here lies the most significant discrepancy between our two countries. Poland is ranking in the top quintile, while Sweden in the lower quintile. In a Polish workplace uncertain situations, market fluctuations, new tasks, new managers or colleagues, risk taking (such as delegation to new or young employees) leave the majority of employees feeling threatened, thus stressed and anxious. In Sweden on the other hand similar situations can even be encouraged by for example changing team leaders or lines of command regularly, or having multiple superiors at the same time (Tollgerdt-Andersson, 1996). Additionally, this low score manifests through low bureaucracy, lower hierarchy, by tasks not being clearly described and by being open to new and innovative ideas (Källström, 1995).

The dimension of time, namely the focus on either long or short-term goals gives us the national cultures emphasize perseverance and the continuous work towards a goal which lies ahead in the future, *thrift*, though being conscious and moderate in the use of resources, *the willingness to subordinate oneself for a purpose* and *having respect for circumstances* (Hofstede, 2005), or as Trompenaars would have put it- an *external locus of control* (2012). Sweden and Poland have a close score on this index, showing that the discrepancy in cultural behavior when it comes to goal setting and time orientation is small. Although it might be pointed out that this dimension can be divided into sublevels. Trompenaars (2012) presents a different index, showing percent of respondents having an internal

locus of control, hence believing that the individual has higher control over its surroundings. Here Poland scores 38 percent, while Sweden (that is in the lower seven) scores 21 percent showing that Swedes to a lower extent believe that they can influence the weather (Trompenaars, 2012, p. 174).

3.4. Creation of a third culture

There is a search for a leadership style that would work "with international competences" (Tollgreth-Andersson). In the cross-cultural situation that arises when managers and employees from different cultures work together, it is inevitable that the interaction results in a culture neither fully conforming to one or the other national culture. The expatriate has to adapt to the country in which he operates (Källström, 1995). The organizational evolution resulting in a *third culture* is scrutinized by Rodriguez (2005) in his study of US/Mexican organizations. What he finds is that the managers form different cultures construct a completely new setting, inspired by the cultures involved in the cooperation. Further Rodriguez introduces the idea that by setting up bi-, or multicultural teams you can create higher effectiveness in the company.

4. Findings

Below are the results from the semi-structured interviews conducted for this study. All the respondents were at the time employed in Polish subsidiaries to Swedish companies, or in companies founded by a Swede living in Poland. The nationality distribution was 64 percent Polish nationals and 36 percent Swedish. Distribution to level of employment was: 14 percent on executive level (including owners), 42, 8 percent country managers and 42, 8 percent middle line managers.

Through analysis of the answers it was possible to detect certain areas of significance to answer the questions posed in this paper, upon which clusters have been created. The ranges of clusters are seen to overlap in some instances and aim to give a fundamental structure to the results.

4.1. Hierarchy

The emotional distance between an employee working on operational level and a top manager is not significant; having said this there is a hierarchical structure present in all of the companies presented here. It can be noticed that the two large companies (having more than 800 employees), also being multinational companies, had hierarchical structures that were more pronounced, as well as

higher perceived power distance by the manager. It was also explicitly said by two of the respondents of Swedish origin, that the hierarchical structure and the possibility to maintain emotional distance to their employees was one thing they liked in Poland, "it is important to keep the lines of command intact, not to erode the structure which will affect the effectiveness". Even in the smaller companies managers pointed out that it facilitates daily work procedures when there are clear lines of command, giving them more authority than they would have had in Sweden. In those companies of larger scale and presence in several countries, there is a significantly higher emphasis on regulating corporate behavior and structure from the Swedish headquarters.

4.2. Decision making

All Polish respondents on executive and country management levels stated that the decision making process is longer in the Swedish companies than in non-Swedish companies they have worked for earlier. Situations which require rapid decision making suffer from the emphasis on consensus. Swedish managers prioritize dialogue with employees and trying to anchor decisions rather than ensuring efficiency of decision making. In the two companies which were managed by Poles, according to the managers themselves, decision making is more centralized in the day to day practices of the businesses. Swedish superiors are usually consulting the polish managers before making decisions and in one company those decisions regarding the operation of the polish facilities the Polish manager always have the last say. When dealing with Swedish superiors it is explicitly articulated by several Polish respondents that discussions and consensus processes prevail in decision making something that result in "long, continuous and unstructured meetings".

4.3. Individual responsibility in combination with delegation

Of those companies which have been present on the Polish market a longer time (establishing on the Polish market in the end of the eighties or beginning of the nineties), the expatriates who initially set up the business some ten years ago, have a hard time adapting to the new business environment in Poland and handing over to Polish managers. In one of the interviews, coincidently the one company that has had operations in Poland for the longest time, it was clearly expressed that the old generation of expatriates was unwilling to let the top positions go to Polish candidates.

Despite this, all the Swedish firms, apart from the one legal practice, advocate delegation of tasks to lower levels. This is working well between the

higher layers of the companies, but not so well at operation al level. Managers state that employees are afraid of making mistakes, and being responsible for the mistakes of others.

There is a general understanding from the side of the Swedish managers that the polish managers and employees have to have clear tasks to perform. They do not expect a Polish manager to take care of the tasks assigned to lower level managers if needed, unless explicitly told to do it. All of the managers and executives interviewed stated that they employ people who take responsibility for their actions and decisions, not letting the lower levels take the blame.

4.4. Communication

Openness of communication is emphasized in all but one of the companies. "The door is always open" was stated in three of the interviews. Lower lines employees can, if necessary bypass middle managers and head straight for the top of the organization. In some cases Swedish executive visit the plants and speak to employees on the operational level. One country manager describes a situation where he is talking to employees working on operational level outside of Warsaw. As he walks around he gets the impression that "they were not comfortable bringing their ideas to their polish managers, which is a pity since these employees usually have innovative and very good ideas". On the higher levels of the organization communication flows openly, but on these lower levels of the organization it is a problem, especially when the plant manager is Polish. The lower line managers are not aware to the same extent of the negative influence of power distance on communication and performance. This is one of his biggest challenges for Swedish managers, how to ensure communication and less emotional distance between middle managers and their subordinates. In one instance the Swedish country manager employed a polish coach in order perform feedback and leadership training for the top managers, he is now considering to do the same on the lower levels of the organization.

A certain error in communication might appear. One interviewee gave the example of the Swedish boss telling the employee "it would be good if you had time to look this over until tomorrow". In this case a Swedish employee would sit until ten a clock at night, since he understood that the boss wanted him to be finished with the assigned text until the next morning, while the Polish employee would finish his work day at four, not reading the text. He understood the boss statement as a proposal rather than a direct order. In this case the boss has to explicitly tell his Polish employee: "Please read this until tomorrow", which for a Swedish employee would sound blunt to say the least.

Communication in this case has to do with the access provided to lower levels of the company as well. Polish managers, in all interviews reported that, for example financial information, budgets and proposed structural changes were usually accessible to them. This was stated as a significant difference in corporate regulations compared to the local Polish companies. One middle manager said that when his company was still locally owned, they never knew how their budget actually looked like; they had to ask their manager to give them an approximation. "Today I cannot imagine running my unit without access to the budget" he added that the increased trust has lead to increased efficiency of his team.

4.5. Long term orientation

In only two of the six companies have there been articulated preference for micromanagement. The motivation goes that it is not possible to, as in Sweden leave employees to their own discretion and wait for results. Tasks have to be given on a short term basis and clearly described. But in the other five cases goals are set to leave teams or individuals work towards a goal with extensive freedom to organize work their own efforts. The only kind of control performed in these cases was either daily or weekly meetings with superiors.

4.6. Uncertainty avoidance

Delegation of responsibility is common throughout the companies studied and is combined with a high level of personal responsibility. Promotions in these companies are done after successful work efforts and by standing out though this work from the crowd. Seniority and contacts are no guarantees for success in these companies. Most Swedish companies are employing young Polish managers with international experience who are fluent in English or Swedes with Polish roots who are familiar with the culture and language. There is a strong encouragement of employees to take new initiatives, on all levels.

To illustrate the differences in this dimension a Swedish executive gave the example of how the budget is set in Poland and Sweden. "In Sweden you are always optimistic and set a high target for the coming year, even though this might not be reached. In Poland, managers set lower budgets, in fear of not being able to deliver a higher one". He had asked his polish country manager about the expected profit and had received the response: two million krona. When the Swedish boss was asked the same question, he stated that he aimed at twenty million. "I had to compromise and set the target between five and ten million krona". This example shows the difference in mentality of those two workers, the Swede although knowing that twenty million might not be plausible sets

a higher target to make perceptions better. The Polish manager sets a lower, since he from experience knows that if he over values the expected profit he risk looking his job.

4.7. A culture of meetings

All of the respondents, regardless of nationality or level indicated that meetings are held frequently. Depending on the level of the organization meetings were held daily (on the lower levels), weekly, biweekly or monthly (the top layer). Teams usually meet once per day, while higher level managers meet on a weekly or biweekly basis. A majority stated that meetings were held on a daily basis. Meetings at the higher levels of the organization are usually held monthly and involve some kind of decision to be made. The polish managers expressed a slight frustration in this regard. Meetings are according to them held too often, being too long and too unstructured. Apart from the official meetings, managers are expected to be available for drop-in meetings whenever the need arises on lower levels.

In addition to the meetings overseeing the operations of the business there are other types of meetings in the Swedish company for example the breakfast meetings, to start the day. Those working with Swedes for a longer period of time will be familiar with the term "fika" which implies a short break during the day, in between meals where coffee and cake is obligatory.

Employees from all levels are given the opportunity to meet either superiors or a responsible from the human resource department to hold individual development meetings. These are set in order to set professional objectives for the coming six months or year, and aligning the employees personal goals with that of the company. During these meetings employees can apply for funds for further development outside the company, trainings and conferences.

4.8. Identification with the company

All of the representatives acknowledged that they felt as active parts of the companies. There are clear incentives given to employees ensure just that. A strong emphasis is put on creating employee identification with the company, throughout the interior levels of the company. The Swedish managers affirmed that if their employees do not feel as a part of the company something is wrong.

The way to sustain this differs. The larger companies encourage employees to create sport teams which play in tournaments sponsored by the company.

Other initiatives include regular dinners, parties or arranged trips. There is special focus on positive feedback, maybe a little too much even as one middle line managers stated that "Swedish never give any criticism. I never know if there are things I need to work harder at". The message created by the Swedish company is that employees should feel taken care of and appreciated by their employers.

4.9. Physical appearance

In companies which are set up by Swedes living in Poland or by Swedish expatriates, the interior landscapes are, maybe not surprisingly following Swedish design and regulations: Large windows, minimalistic setting, see through glass doors where applicable, plants, ergonomic adaptable desks and chairs, open office spaces and recycling of office waste. In the two companies which are managed by Poles, these guidelines are strictly regulated through international company guidelines. The thought behind the conformance of physical spaces into Swedish standards is to inspire openness of communication, decrease the emotional distance and perceived hierarchy to contribute to an innovative, creative and friendly environment.

4.10. Perception of Polish managers towards Swedish corporate culture

In the two cases where the Swedish companies have been managed by Poles those managers have all been positive towards the Swedish corporate culture. "A completely different company compared to polish standards" was stated more than once in these companies referring to the regulations, the incentives given, and the opportunity to get funds for training and travels as well as rights for women going on maternity leave. The accessibility of information to middle management is highly appreciated "Today I cannot imagine working without knowing by budget for the coming period". The friendliness of executives and ability to cross lines of command when necessary were also features important in the eyes of polish middle managers.

But there were also some negative feedback, indecisiveness, long and unstructured business meetings without content, lack of constructive feedback, too much focus on doing things according to the regulations or rules, and ambivalence towards deadlines ("it seems as though Swedes set deadlines with the sole purpose of passing it").

4.11. Perception of Swedish managers towards Polish corporate culture

One executive states that he prefers the Polish corporate culture over the Swedish, and thinks it more efficient and productive. "In Sweden you try to plan everything, every change, every investment down in complete detail". This process usually takes months, and at every step of the way, when challenges arise or changes have to be made to the initial plan, the whole process of involving everyone in the decisions have to be started once again. A process that in Sweden would take one and a half year, would according to hum in Poland take three to six months. Polish coworkers are generally perceived by Swedes as hard working, dedicated, thinking outside the box in order to get the job done. What was pointed out by Swedish managers was that they noticed a strong preference towards job stability, this in contrast to the situation in Sweden where the turnover of youths is higher. But in Poland they find themselves satisfied with their position and pay in the Swedish company, which is highly appreciated by the companies since it facilitates the identification with the company.

Many Polish managers share a sort of distrust towards their employees which is articulated through increased authority, less communication and less delegation. Delegation has to in these cases be actively encouraged by the superiors.

The Polish system of bureaucracy is indicated several times as a barrier to conducting business successfully "We need to have one lawyer employed full time just to make sure we can handle the paper work" states a Swedish manager in Warsaw.

4.12. Creation of a third culture

In three of the interviews it was stated that the two cultures are integrating effectively, implying that the Swedish manager is open for Polish influences. In these cases the Swedish managed acknowledges the positive effect of the polish influences, those of applying more authority and centralizing decision making when the situation requires it, giving clearer descriptions of tasks and being more open for straight forward criticism as well being concise in discussions and heading straight for the focal point of the argument. The Polish managers are influenced by the Swedish openness of communication, talking freely, discussing "getting the emotions out there" instead of creating silent oppositions. But this interaction has to be enforced by strong, competent and aware leaders who are present on every day basis, especially in the beginning of a set-up. It is

a never ending process, encouraging people to speak their mind and take part in decisions.

"I come to Poland with the idea of implementing seventy percent Swedish business culture while integrating it with thirty percent Polish culture. This was ten years ago, and today I can honestly say it is the reverse situation and it works incredibly well". In this situation it should be stated that the distribution of percentages might differ depending on the nationality of the majority of the company's stakeholder, in the example above the majority of customers and suppliers are Polish although it is a Swedish owned company. In another example, where the majority of customers are Scandinavian it is explicitly reflected in the corporate culture and its regulations for internal as well as external behavior. By being open for Polish influenced to increase the tempo and efficiency of decision making with the Swedish culture of planning, measuring and keeping operations structured it usually turns out to be the best and most efficient solution.

Recommendation from Swedish managers and experts to future Swedish investors:

Before coming
– Do you homework before coming to Poland. Make contact with experienced business owners and set up a contact network prior to arriving. You can do this though contacting the Swedish Chamber of Commerce or the Polish-Scandinavian Chamber of Commerce.
– Make contact with Swedish legal councils and Swedish banks to facilitate your operation, today there are several of both with extensive experience of the Polish market.
– Spend time and effort on finding a good and competent leader to manage in a cross-cultural operation; do not choose someone because that person did such an excellent job setting up operations in Mexico.
– Make use of employees with the right experience and preferably with origins from the country that you want to operate in (bilingual/ bicultural), in today's world there are many potential candidates.
– Send Polish managers to Sweden to see how the flat structure and open communication work in practice, it will be cheaper than financing a Swedish manager to go to Poland for x amount of time to set up operations.
Be aware of courtesy
– In the initial phase of conducting business, take care of the formalities, be sure to be well dressed and have your card available. This formality will decrease in importance after your Polish counterpart gets to know you better, but in the beginning this is imperative.

- Take care of traditions such as standing up when someone is coming or leaving the meeting.
- Use titles (this is usually perplexing to Swedes, but nonetheless it is of extreme importance to Poles).
- When travelling from Sweden for business encounters, stay overnight and let your host take you home for dinner. Be sure to bring flowers for the wife and share a drink with the husband. The personal contact is important in Poland and will facilitate future business with that person.

Setting up the operation

- Be clear in the tasks that you delegate. When you think that you are precise in the description of tasks, think again and reformulate even more precisely- otherwise you will probably not get it done!
- Do not try to impose Swedish leadership on Polish employees. Try your outmost to understand the concept of cultural relativism and be open for the influences of the Polish culture.
- The Swedish corporate culture has many advantages and can be used with positive results in Poland. Use the values of trust and honesty to structure your work, but the specifics of Swedish corporate culture has to be (if at all) imposed on the terms of the receiver (the Polish employees).
- The country manager, whether Swedish or Polish has to be the link between the Swedish headquarters and the Polish employees. This person has to understand of the demands of both sides, and ensure successful outcomes in negotiations. This person has to be able to articulate the demands of the Swedish headquarters, and the advantages involved with having a Swedish owner to the Polish employees, but also communicate the demands and culture of the Polish employees, their needs and expectations to the Swedish headquarters. If you acknowledge that the Polish employees know the market and situation better than you do, this should not be very difficult.
- If you feel that the cultural differences are bothering your work, get an individual coach to help you work with understanding the differences in working culture.

5. Conclusion

Let us look at the questions posed in the beginning of this article

- Could increased knowledge of the advantages linked to the result of positive interaction between Swedish and Polish corporate culture and management provide an incentive for Swedish companies to invest more into Poland?

- What are the obstacles and opportunities facing managers in a cross-cultural setting and how can they be used to enhance company efficiency?
- What is created as two cultures interact?

Poland has learned from its transition to a free market economy the importance of a well-functioning and effective corporate culture. Although there are still external factors, such as bureaucracy and complicated legislation that hampers the effectiveness of its private and public sector, Poland has an extraordinary opportunity to develop a unique edge in their corporate culture. Sweden on the other hand has been fortunate enough to experience a (comparably) stable political and free economical climate. It is through this socio-economic stability that the concept of Swedish management has developed. But will the Swedish corporate culture, as well as the consensus seeking leadership it advocates, survive the competition on a global arena which demands decisiveness, risk taking and efficiency? It seems as though Swedish managerial culture has become too comfortable in its seat, still reminiscing the days of praise and advocacy. With this said, Swedish managers in this study have, for the most part shown remarkable initiatives to understand and integrate the Polish culture into their own companies from communication and feedback sessions to seeking the help of consultants to increase understanding for the differences in culture and its effect on the behavior of workers. This shows us that there is a significant interest from the Swedish manager to be influenced by the Polish culture, in several interviews it was stated that the Polish employees challenge the Swedish management with its demand for efficiency.

It might be stated that Swedish leadership style works well with the higher layers of hierarchy, while at lower levels employees prefer a more authoritarian leadership. Something that has been clearly stated as a positive feature of the Swedish culture is the accessibility of information throughout the hierarchy, the feeling of being trusted and giving responsibility. The companies that most successfully have integrated the two cultures are those who are consciously and actively working with it.

6. Discussion

The key notions throughout this article have been culture, cultural dimension, cultural behavior and corporate culture and have their roots in findings of Czarniawska and Sevón, 2003; Lewin, 2008; Trompenaars, 2012; Hofstede, 2005; Joynt and Warner, 1996; Holmberg and Åkerblom, 1998, which state that there exists a correlation between our individual national culture and the culture of our workplace. As a manager you might ask yourself what this has to do with your

management and business specifically, but there are only few who still diminishes the importance of culture on the company. The culture of your company guides the way in which your employees work together, the way they solve problems and handle challenges (Schein, 1985) and as shown by Kotter and Heskett in 1993 there exists a correlation between the corporate culture of your business and its potential to growth. Additionally they demonstrate that strictly authoritarian and aggressive cultures, such as the ones seen in Proctor and Gamble, Citicorp or General Motors, can indeed have a negative impact on company performance.

What are then the corporate cultures of Sweden and Poland? The Swedish manager is said to be a "representative", a negotiator between democracy and economic interests, and the role is that of a consultant with the task of providing guidance and support to workers. In Poland, there is a preference for a strong and authoritarian manager, with significant emotional distance. This difference is supported by the Masculinity Index of Hofstede in which the two countries scores are disparate. In Sweden, it is a virtue not to give specified tasks, believing it fosters self-development, but in Poland it is considered irresponsible. The Swedish manager asks for support, the Polish manager demands it. According to Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance dimension Swedes enjoy an unpredictable business context, and are more open for changes in the workplace, while the Polish employee feels threatened by it. But the results of the interviews conducted to this study seem to contradict this notion by stating that Swedes cling excessively to rules and regulations and prefer being well organized, have accurate measures and plan everything in advance. Maybe the score of uncertainly avoidance is biased due to the lack of rapid changes and unpredictable situations in Sweden for the last three hundred years. This can be reflected also by the Swedish decision making process, always aspiring to have the support of the whole group, something that requires much diplomacy, time and patience. The rapidly changing business context in Poland might require another technique. Ever since the early eighties Swedish leadership has been praised by scholars from around the world (Källström, 1995; Czarniawska and Sevón, 2003; Tollgerdt-Andersson, 1996), which might be why Swedes suffer from a slight sense of superiority. This lack of self-awareness, although contradictory to the Swedish mentality of equality and humbleness, can be seen in literature on Swedish management (Källström, 1995; Lewis, 2005) but have not been clearly articulated by the respondents, rather the opposite. Swedes have been seen to be very open to the influences of the Polish culture, this is at least true for the Swedish managers in Poland.

As stated by Blazyca in Bateman (1997), the Polish business context is at present a melting pot of different managerial influences and still has the possibility to create a business culture that builds upon its historical strengths,

incorporates advantageous behaviors from other cultures and eliminates its weaknesses. The Polish corporate culture has many strengths, it emphasizes hard work, and understandably it is motivated by factors such as income and status (since denied it for a significant period of time), prides itself with working around the obstacles and thinking outside the box in order to get a job done and finally something especially interesting to Swedish companies, Poles are grateful and loyal employees. The communistic heritage when it comes to management is still present, and guides certain behavior, such as creating silent opposition and informal networks (Kozminski, 2006). But just because it is linked to a past negatively remembered to many Poles, and having been challenged in the modern business context, these specific dysfunctional behaviors of the Polish corporate culture are slowly disappearing. One thing that is still very much present, and influences both individual firms as well as the society at large, is the excessive bureaucracy and legislation which is mentioned both in literature (Larsson and Nilsson, 2004; Lewis, 2008; Johansson, 2004) and in the interviews as a factor curbing business activity.

The creation of a third culture in inevitable in a corporate setting when joining two different cultures (Rodriguez, 2005). I would argue that managers with the right mind set, patience and understanding; can use conflicting cultural elements to force companies to reevaluate their own cultural behavior and strategies. By exposing a company to cultural conflicts it forces organizational change towards more flexibility and innovation.

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