Cross-cultural Communication

With a focus on Swedish and Chinese employees

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Abstract

With China’s economic development in recent years, Sweden has seen an increase in business trade with China. Since foreign investments in China are increasing, connections are strengthened and the potential of China’s economy is recognized. Our thesis is trying to explain what cultural differences lead to inefficient cross-cultural communication and how it is influenced by cultural differences. The purpose of this thesis is to understand and evaluate how culture influences the communication between Chinese and Swedish employees in the working environment. The empirical section is conducted with the qualitative method followed by interviewing Swedish and Chinese employees respectively. The results show that a) Swedish and Chinese culture, b) the power distance and c) the high and low context communication styles are the most influential cultural differences that contribute to cross-cultural communication amongst Swedish and Chinese employees.

**Keywords:** Sweden and China culture characteristics, cultural differences, communication
Summary

This thesis is to study cross-cultural communication amongst Swedish and Chinese employees. The reason this topic is chosen is based on individual observation in a multinational company regarding insufficient communication due to cultural differences. The aim of this thesis is to help Swedish and Chinese employees to understand the reasons behind miscommunication and to assist in making appropriate proactive adjustments in communication when it is needed.

The thesis starts with a background introduction which explains the growing business cooperation between China and Sweden and the need for efficient communication among individuals. It is followed by a literature review, consisting of a brief culture overview of China and Sweden, their cultural differences based on Hofstede (2001) research findings, Hall (1990) high context and low context communication and Guirdham (1999) communicating across cultures.

An empirical study based on the qualitative method is conducted in the form of interviews amongst the chosen Chinese and Swedish employees across four industries. The interview results show the following major concerns:

- English language is still a big barrier and cultural differences result in different interpretation of the same words;
- Chinese prefer an indirect way of communicating whereas Swedish prefer direct communication;
- Chinese tend to only follow their manager’s decisions while Swedish dare to challenge the manager’s decisions;
- Subordinates feel it is easier communicating with a Swedish manager than with a Chinese manager because of the power distance.
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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

With the economic development, the economy becomes more global. Meanwhile the enterprise management philosophy, organizational models and management practices are undergoing changes. According to Schmidt et al. (2007), because of technological development has changed the way of information and expertise around the world, it leads to the growing numbers of multinational corporations.

Multinational organizations are playing a significant role in the world economy. According to Schmidt et al. (2007), multinational organizations have established domestic and international markets that can provide import and export productions, joint ventures and business contracts. Multinational organizations that help to improve the process of globalization also use global resources to build international industry alliances. Meanwhile international connectedness is a key measure of globalization in international business (Schmidt et al., 2007).

There are some known Swedish companies invested in China, such as IKEA and Ericsson. By the end of 2010, there are more than 200 Swedish companies that are invested and located in China. On the contrary, more and more Chinese companies are showing great interests in investing in Sweden, for example, Hua Wei and ZTE are two of the biggest Chinese telecommunications companies that have their development offices in Sweden. A number of small scale Chinese companies have their investments in Sweden as well. Furthermore, it is observed that both Sweden and China have shown increasing interests of doing business together in a wider range. And China remains the most popular destination in the world because of the population and resources.
1.1.1. Problem

The background leads to a global working environment for everyone involved in the business. Both managers and employees are highly exposed in a multinational organization which demands them to work effectively with people from different cultures with different values. Misunderstandings result in low efficiency or worse, business failure.

The example that will be demonstrated here is a real case observed by the author with previous work experience in a Swedish company invested in China. The story happened to a Chinese manager who is the author’s former co-worker. Due to business, there are regular meetings between Swedish and Chinese managers. This Chinese manager always hesitated if she should bring up the issues she got from her subordinates complaining about their Swedish interfaces. If she brings them up in the meetings to the Swedish manager, will the Swedish manager feel embarrassed or does it sound like she is complaining? Most of the time, she did not mention anything about such problems in meetings. She often expected to communicate those issues with Swedish managers in private instead of in official meetings. When she finally told the Swedish manager about her difficulty to discuss these problems in meetings, the Swedish manager could not comprehend her reasons why and blamed her for not bringing up these issues earlier. Because she is not used to this way of working, she felt bad about it, yet she still doubts if the problems could have been solved when they were brought up in official meetings.

The desire of studying cross-cultural communication is highlighted and strengthened by this case in the author’s mind. It forms the motivation for this thesis. To be able to study further, cultural differences and communication theories are concluded as two major aspects that might contribute to this subject study.

1.1.2. Cross-Cultural Communication

Cross-culture is the interaction between two or more different groups that have different background and culture. Cultural differences are normally listed as dissimilar language, background, perceptions and mentalities (Ling et al., 2007). According to Hofstede et
al. (2010), culture is civilization, training and mind. They are not rules that regulate social behaviors but they help people distinguish one group from another. Human civilizations create and form culture during the evolution process. In a globalized world, material and the spirit of civilization gives a novel feeling to everyone. Meanwhile it is challenging human beings to tolerate the vast cultural differences. The different accounts of cultures within countries contain regional, ethnic and religious; ethic and religious transcend the border of politics (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Different values can lead to cross-culture conflict. The values are basic judgment for people to judge good or bad and right and wrong. Values are the deepest part of the culture, which are dominating people’s beliefs, attitudes and actions. Different employees have different values, so the essential conflict between employees is the conflict of their values. In the eighties, Hofstede did his research at IBM, through a large amount of questionnaires, he summarized the five dimensions that are individual and collective, masculinity and femininity, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and long-and short-term orientation.

“Cultural dimension measure values it is a conception, distinctive of individual, and desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means and ends of action” (Fink et al., 2006: p40). The differences of values are also considered as the major barriers in the cross-cultural communication. In a certain culture environment a certain way of communication is conducted; the big myth of intercultural communication is people expect others to do as they do; the disappointment would result in failure in cross-cultural communication. Also different beliefs, differences in understanding cultural symbols and misunderstanding of context result in cross-cultural conflicts.

Multinational organizations do business with different cultures. If organizations cannot effectively manage cultural differences, it would cause cultural conflict and cultural confusion. Both of them are influencing each other. Cross-cultural conflict affects the relationship between multinational managers and local employees and the gap between
them would run big. How to solve the cultural conflicts is critical for multinational corporations to achieve effective management and their goal.

“The most successful firms in the global arena will be companies whose employees not only understand world economics and global compositeness but who also have the ability to communicate effectively with international counterparts” (Smith and Steward, 1995:p15). Schmidt et al. (2007) state that based on the latest research, there is a strong correlation between effective business communication and successful business operations in the fields of management, marketing, finance and production.

Intercultural communication is defined by many scholars: Jandt (2003) defined that intercultural communication, in its most general sense, occurs when one culture produces a message for interpretation by a member of another culture. It can be interpreted that intercultural communication is communication between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication events.

Chaney & Martin (1999) defined intercultural business communication as communication within and between businesses that involves people from more than one culture.

Schmidt et al. (2007) gave a definition of intercultural communication saying that it is a recognition process that people from different cultures reach their goals by trying to understand each other’s cultural awareness. The difference between intercultural communication and other types of communication is that intercultural communication is interacting with people from different cultures (Schmidt et al., 2007).

Culture influences every single aspect of intercultural communication, and intercultural communication is influenced by organizational, cultural and national culture at the same time. And culture plays the most important role in intercultural communication because of its dominating influence on people’s thinking and behavior except for individual differences. Consequently the main challenge for intercultural communication is how people from one cultural background would react to other cultures when there are cultural conflicts.
1.2. Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to understand and evaluate how the culture influences employee communication in the multinational organization environment. The reason the subject was chosen is based on individual experiences with conflicts in daily operation in some existing multinational organizations. Conflicts cause misunderstandings, project delay and low work efficiency. Therefore it is critical to study the cultural impacts on communication with the aim of improving cross-cultural communication efficiency as a consequence of business success.

1.3. Research Questions

Given the purpose of the thesis, the research questions are:

1. What are the major issues concerning cross-cultural communication during the interaction between Chinese and Swedish employees?

2. How are they (the issues) influenced by cultural differences?

1.4. Limitations

When reading this thesis, keep in mind the following limitations in terms of findings, analysis and conclusion:

- The region limitation focuses on China and Sweden. One should consider the corporations between China and Sweden, means corporations located in China but with Swedish investment, corporations located in Sweden but with Chinese investment. The interactions among the employees are within these two different culture backgrounds.

- Even with the same national culture background, individuals may respond differently due to different personality, grow up environment or just different understanding of the culture values. Findings in this paper are based on the involved individuals.
• National culture and organizational culture are not distinguished in the context when talking about cross-culture.

• Issues discussed in this paper have a focus on work environment but private life encounters are not included.
2. Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this thesis is to understand and evaluate how the culture influences employee communication in the multinational organization environment, therefore the choice to use Hofstede et al. (2010) cultural dimensions theory was a logical choice. By focusing on the two countries working environments, Hofstede et al. (2010) cultural dimensions theory is more appropriate for thesis research. The Hofstede et al. (2010) theory is considered the classic model that has been used in many tangible cases and has been recognized by many scholars and researchers. Hofstede et al. (2010) can help to explain in better detail the differences in culture between Sweden and China.

Guirdham (1999) argued that communication is also the basis of cultural difference. It was argued language and communication affects people in a cross-cultural business environment. The purpose of the paper is to find out the major issues concerning cross-cultural communication at work and give overall communication knowledge that will be in favor of understanding empirical findings and evaluate the results from different aspects.

Other than Hofstede et al. (2010) cultural dimensions, and Guirdham (1999) communication, a cultural overview of China and Sweden are reviewed first.

2.1. Culture overview: China and Sweden

2.1.1. Confucianism and its impact on Chinese organization

Confucianism is generally considered as the foundation of Chinese culture and tradition. To develop a harmonious society by moderated communication process. “The Confucius values encompass moral cultivation, family and interpersonal relationships, respect for age and hierarchy, harmony and face” (Fu & Kamenou, 2011: p3274). The guiding rules of Confucianism are as followings (Hofstede, 2001):

1. Wu Lun, five basic relationships are defined as: master-follower, father-son, elder brother-younger brother, husband-wife, and senior friend-junior friend. It emphasizes the different social positions people have, and it advocates juniors to show respect to seniors and show obedience, meanwhile seniors have the responsibility of training and
protecting juniors.

2. Each family is a small group in society, everyone in a family should always consider the whole family situation instead of only themselves. Self-discipline is highly valued. Furthermore, to retain face in terms of dignity, self-respect and prestige is the basis of a harmonious society.

3. The Chinese Golden Rule-“Virtuous behavior towards others consists of not treating others as one would not like to be treated oneself” (Hofstede, 2001: p354).

4. Life value is praised by acquiring skills and knowledge, working hard and modesty.

Influenced by Confucian values, four features of Chinese culture relevant to organizations are presented by Lockett (1988):

- Show more respect to people who are older and accept hierarchical management; Elder people are considered as experienced and wiser, thus their opinions tend to be easily taken into account in a discussion. Similar thinking is applied to hierarchical management. Everyone in an organization should be aware of their position, managers expect to be respected and obeyed by subordinates. Subordinates are trained to listen to managers; lower level managers should follow upper level managers.

- Group orientation is superior to individual orientation. At work, one project is regarded as a group; the whole project department is seen as another group, the organization to which the project department belongs to can also be considered as a group. Collective honour is always higher than that of personal honour.

- The importance of face. “Giving face” and “losing face” are equally important in Chinese culture. When someone achieves something he or she is proud of gaining respect by other people, it means “giving face”. If people feel they lose respect from other people they may think they’ve lost face. This is something all people are trying to avoid.

- The importance of relationships. The relationship means a tie between people who have previously built trust. The relationship and contract are equally important in business. It results in unclear
statement in contracts because they believe the other parties will not deceive them based on the relationship they have. With good relationships, business can be more flexible; with mediocre relationships, people prefer to strictly follow the contracts. Even the organizations are more formulated now than in earlier years and relationships remain a key element in business.

2.1.2. Swedish culture and organization

Sweden is widely known as a socio-democratic society. To a certain extent it explains the work ethic in Sweden and equality is strongly advocated. Research reveals some attributes concerning Swedish culture, lack of hierarchy, feminism and high level of tolerance of uncertainty (Birkinshaw, 2002):

Strong collectivist thinking has Sweden owning a higher rate of large companies per head of population in the world. It is a similar culture value which China possesses too, the group gains higher importance than the individual. Lack of hierarchy provides open and free communication between managers and subordinates, because everyone should be equal. Feminism is reflected by many aspects. At work, Swedish people tend to avoid aggressive communication, instead try to understand and support each other.

Swedish management style is emphasized in two elements, empowering and coaching. Although how to balance these two is a challenge to management, still it is a recommended management method proved to be efficient in Sweden. Empowering means people who actually do the work have certain rights to decide themselves what needs to be done and how to do it. They are encouraged in the decision making process. Coaching is concerning giving guidance to subordinates in daily activity, encouraging them in team work and showing interest in individual development.

It is interesting that the structure of Swedish organizations claim to be ambiguous. While control processes are practiced, they are often informal yet efficient. The key attributes of individuals are self-respect, skillfulness, self-control and flexible commitment (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1993).

2.2. Geert Hofstede: cultural dimension theory

The progresses of world societies promote more cultural communication. The key issue becomes the question of how to solve the cultural conflicts issues during the national
cultures communication. In this world between people, nations and organizations there are conflicts, and their way of thinking and behaviors are different. According to Hofstede et al. (2010), culture is a conditioning of people’s minds; culture is a way to help people use their minds to distinguish people from different groups. The cultural differences are rooted in different nation’s minds and are hard to be changed and influenced.

The cultural differences are one of the main factors that lead to the cross-cultural communication failure. Hofstede et al. (2010) cultural dimensions theory is an important theoretical analysis of cultural differences. A survey was conducted in forty countries during the seventies of IBM employees’ values based on the survey from the theory. There are five important dimensions in Hofstede et al. (2010) theory that are power distance, individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity versus femininity and long-term orientation versus short-term orientation. The explanations and features of these five dimensions are given below. Furthermore, dimensions of Swedish and Chinese characteristics are presented.

2.2.1. Power distance

The first dimension is how people in the organization and society tolerate and handle hierarchy and distribution of power. Power distance is related to grade. Different countries have different understanding of power, so there are significant variations. Some cultures put more emphasis on authority, status, qualifications, but other countries do not emphasis that much. According to Hofstede et al. (2010), power distance can be defined as less powerful people of institution and organization in countries that expect and accept the power is distributed unequally. This dimension is related to organization structure in which hierarchical level can be recognized.

Power distance is measured from 0 to 100, where 0 represents a small power distance and 100 is a large power distance. In countries where the power distance is small, there are limited dependence between bosses and employees; there is interdependence between each other. In countries with a large power distance, employees are very
dependent on their bosses. Subordinates behaviour prefer this dependence or they decline it entirely (Hofstede et al., 2010).

According to Hofstede et. al. (2010) research, China has the top position of characteristics of large power distance. In Chinese culture, Chinese people inherit Confucianism that exists for thousands of years. Confucius maintained that in the society the relations between people are based on unequal relationships. Confucius has distinguished five relationships that are ruler versus subject, father versus son, older brother versus brother, husband versus wife, senior friend versus junior friend (Hofstede et al., 2010). During these relationships, Confucius maintains people need to respect their bosses, old generation and teachers.

Countries like Sweden have a low power distance with a power distance index of 31. In Swedish culture egalitarianism and democracy have an important role. People want equality in their life and in their work, participation and cooperation are necessary during their working process. In Sweden a lot of initiatives are taken from subordinates (Hofstede et al., 2010).

2.2.2. Individualism versus collectivism

In this dimension it emphasizes the connection between people and groups. The point is to focus on the relationship awareness in organizations and countries. The extreme ways of individualism and collectivism can be seen as the opposite side in the global culture. According to Hofstede et al. (2010), individualism refers the relationship between individuals are loose; people want them or their families to be cared for by others. Collectivism is the opposite of individualism; it refers to that people in societies, from when they were born, are expected to integrate strongly in a group. In the individualistic countries people put their rights and privacies in front, they are more considerate of their personal time and freedom. Individualistic thinking considers that individuals are inseparable from the collective community.

When individuals are in constant pursuit of their interests and dreams, their achievements also promote the progress of society as a whole. Collectivism emphasizes
the importance of countries and organizations, which the values concept of collective interests should be higher than individual interests.

According to Hofstede et al. (2010), in countries like China the values have more characteristics of collectivism. Chinese history is strongly influenced by Confucianism, which indicates people are not living as individuals, they are related to everything. Everyone needs to consider everything universally. China is a socialist country where the ideology of chairman Mao Zedong impacts the societies’ values, he identified individualism as selfishness aversion to discipline, he advocated that people should put group interests in first hand (Hofstede et al., 2010). When working towards the group goal, Chinese collectivist participants represented best.

According to Hofstede et al. (2010) individualism index, Sweden has top position of individualism. This characteristic refers to that people are more considerate of their privacy and their own family and values. Individuals prefer to finish missions individually, and have a general lack of team spirit. Individuals in Sweden focus on thinking about themselves and are independent of others.

2.2.3. Masculinity versus femininity

This dimension focuses on the questions about values of females and males in societies. There are many clear differences between the gender roles in society, masculine approach confidence, to be strong, successful and challenging whereas the feminine approach humility, to be gentle and cooperative. According to Hofstede et al (2010), femininity refers to that gender roles overlap in society, both men and women should be modest, caring of life quality and considerate. Masculinity refers to that in the society the gender roles are distinct; a man should be tough and focus on material success. The masculinity dimension index is used to measure societies, high values of the index means that the society shows a bigger tendency for masculinity, on the contrary, smaller values point at more feminine tendencies (Hofstede et al., 2010).
China has higher scores on masculinity, it also a measure of preference to use power to achieve their purpose (Dong & Liu, 2010). China as a filial society has the top position in emphasizing masculine values. China has a strong awareness of social competition; the scale of success is wealth, fame, and social status. Their values focus on emphasizing competitions, job performances and equality.

According to Hofstede et al. (2010) research, in masculinity-femininity dimension Sweden has the lowest values among the fifty countries. Sweden as a feminist country focuses on cooperation, social security and relationships. There is more emphasis on management issues and Sweden prefers using negotiation and adjustment to solve conflicts (Hofstede et al., 2010).

2.2.4. Uncertainty avoidance

This dimension emphasizes the uncertainty issues in unknown future. Uncertainty avoidance is defined as organizations or groups that encounter uncertainty, when threatened; they attempt to avoid the degree of uncertainty through safety rules and other facets of escape. People use three ways: technology, law and religion to resist the uncertainty of the future (Hofstede et al., 2010). Humans use these three ways to resist the uncertainty of nature, other society members and death. Uncertainty avoidance refers that the extent in unknown and ambiguous situation when one culture feel threatened (Hofstede et al., 2010). The degrees of uncertainty avoidance in different nations vary. Uncertainty avoidance index is used to measure whether a culture has a strong or weak uncertainty avoidance. In strong uncertainty avoidance culture, members are encouraged to overcome and open up to the future, and in weak uncertainty avoidance members are instructed to accept risks, tolerate and accept different culture’s behavior.

It becomes very difficult to change the organization’s structure in strong uncertainty avoidance cultures. Also laws and regulations are necessary for strong uncertainty avoidance culture to control inconsistent behaviours (Hofstede et al., 2010). It is
different in weak uncertainty avoidance culture; people are more adaptable and flexible. They think they can solve problems without rules.

According to Hofstede et al. (2010) uncertainty avoidance index research, during the 76 countries and regions, China got a score of 30 and Sweden got a score of 29 which means both of them belong to the low uncertainty avoidance countries.

**2.2.5. Long-term orientation versus short-term orientation**

Michael Harris Bond (in Hofstede et al. 2010) did his research through the collaboration with Chinese colleagues to found the Chinese Value Survey. Through the analysis of Chinese values, there came a fifth dimension of long-term versus short-term orientation. From Hofstede et al. (2010) based on Chinese Value Survey research; there are 23 countries that have researched long-term orientation which relate to Confucius and his ways of teaching. It represents the influence by Confucianism which has special meaning and refers to long and short term orientation concepts.

Long-term orientation is a dimension of national cultures that emphasize unity; it stands for perseverance and adapting to change current behaviours to be adapted to future purpose. Short-term orientation focuses on past and present virtues, for instance face, respect, national pride and social responsibility (Hofstede et al., 2010). In this dimension long-term orientation mainly represents Confucianism and presents entrepreneurial and indomitable spirit.

Chinese people’s way of thinking and living is based on Confucianism, so in the long-term orientation index, China has top position. In Chinese people’s concept, they should tirelessly achieve their goals; even if the goals are difficult to reach. Comparing with long-term and short-term orientation, Sweden is a country in the middle, but little tendency to long-term orientation values.
2.3. Edward Hall: High-context versus low-context

With the understanding of cross-cultural communication, information underlies virtually everything. It is not surprising that in cross-communication the speed of the specific message can be decoded in an important element (Hall, 1990). The sense of language is created through communication; the meaning of the language is determined according to context. In 1976 Edward Hall put forward his theory about high-context and low-context communication, this concept provides a new perspective to the relationship of cross-culture.

During the communication in high-context culture, most of the information exists in the material context or internalized communications and rarely appear in the clear message. In the low context, a large amount of information depends on the delivery of a clear message. The type of context decides all the aspects of communication. This means that in the low context, people are to rely on language use to achieve the purpose of communication. In the high context, people rely less on the language usage as people in the low context do.

Generally, in high context communication people use indirect messages to express their opinions. Compared with high context, low context communication is more likely to reflect direct exchange and explicit messages (Richardson & Smith, 2007).

In the high context and low context dimension, China has high context culture and Sweden has low context culture. There are many differences compared with Chinese and Swedish context culture. The way of communicating is different, in China, people use indirect ways to communicate and in Sweden people use a direct way to communicate. In China, people consider other’s feelings and the problem of losing face, this way of thinking is influenced by Confucianism that focuses on the group coordination to get used to use tactful ways to express their messages. In order to avoid embarrassing situations they do not want to tell their opinion or refuse others request directly. Swedish people are different, they are more caring about individualism, they do not want to be influenced by other people, so most of the time they are outspoken and express their emotion directly.
In Sweden the way of people’s thinking is linear, and the way they communicate as well. The way they communicate is a step by step process, but Chinese people are different, their way of communicating is nonlinear and indirect. They do not like to express their central ideas directly; people have to decipher, by themselves, the message that’s being conveyed.

2.4. Maureen Guirdham: Communication theory

2.4.1. General Communication

Communication is commonly understood as an act of giving and receiving information, which concerns interaction among participants. According to Sarbaugh (1988), communication is defined as a process. In communication one party interprets the other party’s meaning by observing their signs and symbols in use, no matter if they are the real intention of the senders or if the signs and symbols are being delivered without senders’ conscious. In the cross-culture environment, communication has been viewed as the center of culture discrepancy although language has a big portion of influence on people as well (Guirdham, 1999).

Basic communication elements include verbal and non-verbal communication, state, trait and style in communication, situations, messages and communication strategies. Communication doesn’t exist without these attributes.

Verbal and non-verbal communication

Speech and writing belong to verbal communication. The benefit of language usage is clearly expressed information and intentions, exchanging thoughts and ideas directly. The weak function of using language is the difficulty of expressing feelings and relationships that is a common shortcoming in communication. Further, language has its limitation when the communication is conducted among people who speak different languages. Body language is typical in non-verbal communication and it is widely used in expressing feelings and attitudes. Human beings have general expressions with their body language but also differ across cultures. People from the same culture seem to show more similarity in behavior than people from differing cultures.
State, trait and style in communication

Personal trait plays an important role in communication style that tends to be more sensitive to listeners. Hart & Burks (1972) presented that sensitivity to listen means speakers are easily adjusting their communication way by listeners’ despondence. These groups of people are considered to be more flexible in cross-cultural communication. Assertiveness means fast and confident decision making without inference to others. Assertiveness is understood differently in different culture, positively it is efficient and negatively it is aggressive. It is in close connection with culture background. Besides, Hofstede’s cultural dimensions can give a good explanation of this effect. Therefore, communication style is concluded that under the influence of both individual personality and culture tendency (Gudykunst et al., 1996).

Situations

Situations mean the whole communicating environment when communication is conducted. Participants, subject, where and how it is communicated. People tend to adjust their communication style in certain ways depending on the situation. Different cultural background also shows different understanding of the same situation (Hall, 1981). In cross-cultural work related communication context, people may have their own priority, value on work task with the influence of their culture.

Messages

Messages are the conveyed information in communication behavior, it consists of messages exchanged and acquired meaning. It is argued that messages are to be sent and received, while meanings are not. It requires receivers own interpretation and inference, thus misinterpretation or inference may result in misunderstanding which leads to communication failure (Guirdham, 1999). In cross-culture communication, the tendency of misunderstanding is higher due to the culture barriers.

Communication strategies

People choose appropriate strategy to communicate in order to attain expected goals. And goals work as the major motivation in choosing communication strategies. In work
situations, power and position are seen as decisive factors in the strategy selection (Guirdham, 1999). And Tannen (1990) commented on the strategy selection difference between men and women. Meanwhile, culture is argued have an influential impact on communication strategy application.

2.4.2. Barriers to cross-cultural communication

Burke (1966) argued that communication is never perfect between people because all people are different, different personality, different upbringing or cultures that as a consequence might lead to people interpreting messages in various ways, while due to human beings’ common characteristics; communication between people is possible to be conducted to an extent. There are two sources of communication failures observed by people from different groups. First is the communication between different groups but with the same cultural background, people may show prejudice and stereotyping barriers to other groups, this also applies to communication with cross-cultural background; second are the stereotypical cross-cultural communication barriers (Guirdham, 1999).

General barriers (Guirdham, 1999)

Stereotyping and prejudice are considered the two general barriers in intergroup communication. Stereotyping is now understood as a pattern that people try to use their own values and thoughts to understand other people. The problem observed is people with stereotypical thinking show less interest in people outside of their group. They also have a subjective way of thinking that people from other groups are not trustful, not honest or cooperative. Prejudice is an attitude towards others concerning racism, sexism, ageism and religion. The effect of prejudiced attitudes towards others is treating people differently in a negative way. Moreover, people who hold a prejudiced attitude have a high tendency of misunderstanding the people with whom they intend to communicate. On the contrary, people who are viewed with prejudice easily generate negative views towards people who hold prejudice against them, in the end, effective communication is interrupted.

Cultural specific barriers (Guirdham, 1999)
Language usage, in most cases, is a distinct differentiation among cultures; misunderstanding occurs often in communication due to improper use of language or different interpretation of the same words. Besides, even people speaking the same category of language, for example, English is spoken by many countries, can still cause misunderstanding because of their different cultural background.

Non-verbal behavior mainly points to body language, attitude etc. It is a fact that similar body signals can be interpreted into various meanings across cultures. In some extreme situations, it may have a completely different meaning. In detail, the way people communicate, gestures, eye contact and message delivery are all possibly misunderstood across cultures.

Low-context communication and high-context communication characteristics with corresponding culture can make communication between the two problematic, easily distorting messages. For people with a low-context communication culture, high-context communication people tend to be indirect communicators and do not share enough information in public, however incline to listen to people they have strong relationships with. On the contrary, people who live in a high-context communication culture, have a tendency of over interpreting the shared information and are sensitive to words that are directly spoken.

Communication strategies are dependent on individual style and also cultural differences. For example, the low-context communicator may favour some types of communication strategies whereas high-context communicators favour other types.

There are more cross-culture barriers than mentioned above, such as Ting-Toomey’s (1988) face theory and Ambady et al. (1996) regarding politeness. It is obvious that face awareness and definitions of politeness are different across cultures. Take face theory for example, in some cultures, people try to keep their own face and other people’s as well, while in other cultures, they may value keeping face differently.
Communication is, after all, an interaction between participants. Cross-cultural communication is not an exception but with more uncertainty caused by cultural differences. It is also argued that some cultures themselves contain the barriers of communication regardless of cultural differences (Guirdham, 1999). Cross-cultural communication focuses on communicating smoothly between people from other cultures (Dutta, 2008).

2.4.3. Cross-cultural Communication Approaches

Cross-cultural communication approaches are the theories of trying to improve the communication at work between people with other cultural backgrounds (Guirdham, 1999). As described in general communication and cross-cultural communication barriers, there are so many factors that affect the effective cross-cultural communication. A number of cross-cultural communication theories are developed by researchers in terms of states, traits, styles, situations, interactive behavior and cognitive and affective responses of individuals. A mix of these theories with the focus of interactive behavior will be introduced in the following theories.

Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory (AUM)

It derives from proposals of Berger & Calabrese (1975) that people have the intention of reducing uncertainty at the beginning of interactions with people from other cultures when they first meet. It is discovered that the more people communicate with each other, the better they understand each other thus lowering the uncertainty. Correspondingly, Berger (1987) provided three general strategies in order to lower the degree of uncertainty: 1) A passive way is not taking any effort of changing the situation but just hoping things will get better by itself; 2) an active strategy is to sort out the information through other people or channels; 3) an interactive strategy means to find out what they want to know by interacting with the people directly.

The implication of effective communication in AUM is that communicators should have an alignment pattern of coding and decoding the messages communicated, the key being the degree of similarity. Thus, effective cross-cultural communication can be reached by the extent of sufficient information acquired and adjusting the communicating anxiety.
Provided by Guirdham (1999) people feel more confident and less anxiety in a situation where the communication is conducted in a less formal way. Meanwhile, due to the communicators’ different cultural background, the degree of uncertainty and anxiety are also affected in the communication interaction. A widely used cultural difference theory is Hofstede’s five cultural dimensions which are described in the cross-cultural section of the paper.

_Cultural Identity Negotiation Theory_

Identity negotiation theory is developed from social identity theory, which is raised by Tajfel (1978). Social identity theory means people are used to trying to find positive social identities when they interact with people from different cultures. Cultural identity negotiation theory explained how cultural identities are formed and how they are negotiated between encounters. It says in every process of a business operation, cultural identity negotiations are conducted. Cultural identity will be enriched in the case of successful business cooperation. Cross-cultural communication is considered as communication between people who represent their culture in order to show the different aspects to others. It is claimed that in communication, the participants own standpoint or values decide whether the underlying communication involves cultural dimensions or not. Cultural identities have a great influence on interpersonal communications.

_Ellingsworths adaptation theory_

This theory presents which efforts participants make to adapt to another’s communication style in order to achieve effective communication among different cultures. The participants’ responsibilities have an influence on their ways of communication. Participants may adjust their attitudes, communication styles and behaviors to the others depending on their purposes and undertaking responsibilities. It is argued that if both participants have the purpose of expecting positive results out of the communication, adaption is easily made. If the purpose is not shared, it will most likely be the one who expects a strong positive result that will put in the effort to adapt. The theory focuses on cross-cultural communication process. It is a dynamic process which means participants may adapt to another’s way of communicating through the
whole communicating process. In this process, the behavior of the one who takes initiative of adaption will not only cause influence to the other person, but also to him or herself. Because they will see the changes in themselves during their adaption, either they adhere more to their original cultural concepts or incline to learn from others’ cultures as well. Their future way of communication in a cross-cultural background will also be affected from all their previous experiences.

To summarize the cross-cultural communication theories, it basically includes two major factors which are individual level and interaction process. It requires individuals to reduce the concern of uncertainty by positively seeking for participants’ information before achieving successful communication. Cultural identity negotiation theory reveals the relationship between cultural differences and the interacted communication process. Ellingsworth’s adaption theory presents that participants may adjust their ways of communication by their purposes and responsibilities they hold to gain effective communication.

The above are considered the supporting theories to the subject of this thesis “cross-cultural communication”. They will be used to find the reasons that cause the communication issues in the cross-cultural work environment. Considering the subject discussed in this thesis, a cultural review of China and Sweden is believed to be the root of how people from different cultural backgrounds form their values and opinions. It plays a guiding role in people’s thoughts. And the differences in thoughts have further influence on cross-cultural communication. Hofstede’s five dimensions provide specific aspects that are used in the comparative analysis of interviewees with in the respective culture. According to the interviewee’s reflections, issues caused by power distance are more common and typical in their working environment; therefore it is a focus on analysis in different situations. Communication theories are used in the analysis of language barrier, non-verbal, open discussion issue and the interviewees’ reflections regarding communication obstacles. In fact some interviewees have adjusted their way of communicating by recognizing the differences of different style of communicating. High-low communication is a focus.
3. Methodology

This part of the thesis is a detailed description of research design and method selection. It entails five sections, research design; data collection; data analysis; validity and reliability; critique of qualitative research.

3.1. Research design

According to Bryman & Bell (2007) there are generally two identified research strategies: quantitative and qualitative. The distinctions between them are described as follows: quantitative research emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data and tend to perform a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, which means intention of research is to verify theories. On the contrary, qualitative research emphasizes words, and inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, means the focus is on the generation of theories. In research design, it is a question of what kind of research strategy that should be used depending on the research problem one has. In this thesis, the research questions are to understand the cross-cultural communication problems in the interaction between Chinese and Swedish employees. There are researches which describe the communication features of Chinese people in the cross-cultural environment, and few about Scandinavian communication features in cross-cultural context. However the research in the work communication interaction between Chinese and Swedish is hard to find, thus it forms this thesis’ topic. This is pointed out by Morse (1991), if the research topic is being addressed for the first time within a certain group of people, where there is a missing theory of support to the particular group under study, then the qualitative research approach should be chosen in this case. This research is mostly based on what people under study have said about their experiences, words are preferred to be collected rather than experiment data, in accordance with Bryman & Bell’s study (2007), a qualitative strategy will be applied in this thesis.

After selecting a research strategy, research design is under question. Five different types of prominent research designs are outlined in the study by Bryman & Bell (2007):
• Experimental design, is typically associated with a quantitative research strategy, thus it is not in this thesis’ consideration.

• Cross-sectional design is often called survey design, in which data is collected mainly by questionnaire or by structured interview on more than one case and aimed at a single point in time. This research design is categorized in relation to quantitative research but with an argument of being qualitative research because interviews are used as well. This research could be taken into consideration but due to its requirement for collecting data at the same point in time is hard to be fulfilled, thus this method is also skipped in this paper.

• Longitudinal design can be seen as an extension of social survey research. It has a major contribution in understanding the changes in business and management research. This is inappropriate for the topic of this thesis.

• Case study design means the research is intensively conducted in a single targeted workplace or organization, which is not in accordance to the thesis’s research problem.

• Comparative design has been chosen to be this thesis’s approach. Since this method has a particular application in studying cross-cultural research which fits with this thesis’s research question. As suggested by Hantrais (1996), comparative design research can be applied in the context that studying particular issues through comparison of their different behaviors. In this thesis, the comparison will be made between Swedish people and Chinese people during their interaction with each other at work, with cross-cultural communication as the focus. The purpose is to understand what makes the similarities and differences in their interaction process.

3.2. Data Collection

Other than the selection of research strategy and research design, data collection has the same importance. In this thesis, documents, academic books; and interview information are the sources of data collection. Documents and related books are useful in collecting
secondary sources. Interviews are used as the primary source.

### 3.2.1. Primary data

In qualitative research, interviews are regarded as a commonly applied method in data collection. Among many major types of interviews, *focused interview* is defined in that interviewees are asked predominantly open questions about specific situations or reflection based on their experiences (Fiske & Kendall, 1956). Since the thesis’s research area is in a specific situation, during cross-cultural communication between Swedish and Chinese in the workplace, a focused interview is chosen as this thesis’s research method. Based on the selected comparative design approach the interviewees have been categorized into two targeted groups, Chinese and Swedish employees.

*Choice of interviewees*

When deciding which participants should be interviewed for this thesis, the following requirements were considered: Chinese people whose workplace is located in China but have close work relationships with Swedish employees, or Chinese people whose current workplace is in Sweden with Swedish colleagues. With Chinese culture in mind and working with Swedish employees, these Chinese people are presumed to have deep understanding of cross-cultural communication. This group of Chinese people has been chosen for the Chinese category of interviewees. On the other hand, Swedish people who work either in Sweden or China but have very close work relationships with Chinese employees are regarded as the Swedish group of interviewees in this thesis. The differences in industries that may contribute to the subject are not taken into account for the choice of interviewees, because the focus of the thesis is the individual’s reaction between Swedish and Chinese employees cross-cultural communication. All the chosen interviewees are the author’s former colleagues or acquaintances and meet the criterion that is required for this thesis. We believe their rich experience will contribute to this thesis’ purpose.

In total, nine Chinese employees and six Swedish employees were interviewed. All
Swedish interviewees are chosen from one multinational telecommunication company which requires employees ‘tight’ cooperation between China and Sweden. Thus the cross-cultural communication amongst individuals is critical in daily operation. Two out of six interviewees are located in China. One has been working in China for ten years and the other for seven years. Four out of six interviewees are located in Sweden; however all have more than five years experience of working closely with Chinese colleagues. Therefore they are chosen to be interviewed because they have immeasurable experience with this topic. Nine Chinese interviewees are from five industries, two of them are from the telecommunication industry but different companies, one is located in Sweden and the other is in China; one interviewee is a teacher from a Chinese university but currently working in Sweden because of an exchange program; another interviewee is a new graduate who is working in a business company in Sweden; and five interviewees are from one electronics company in China.

The targeted interviewees’ ages vary from 24 to 49 years old. To avoid revealing interviewees’ personal opinions and to be objective when analyzing the responses, all interviewees’ names are withheld from this thesis. The interviews are conducted in a structured way, which means interview questions are prepared in advance and in sequence. A few Chinese interviewees are located in the same city as we are therefore a face to face interview was conducted. The rest of the Chinese and all Swedish interviewees we interviewed were via Skype and Arkadin global conferencing due to the limitation of time and travel.

The limitation of obtaining an ideal result from the interviews in this thesis’s context raises the following concerns: due to the involvement of more than one country, it is not possible to travel the long distance required to perform this research on site; as a consequence it could affect the precision of collected data because it could not be collected in the real situation, for example, without the interviewees face expression, or body language we cannot observe yet these may have some impact on the words interpretation; thirdly, language may lead to misinterpretation of the same words in another culture or because different languages are spoken; last but not least, since it is the interviewees individual experiences of specific situations, they need to recall during
the interview, either the case they presented is not the actual one they encountered or the risk of missing important information that contributes to the research questions better.

3.2.2. Secondary source

Secondary data is in favor of enriching our knowledge within the research field, and it can also provide objective material in supporting our research area. The secondary sources used in this thesis are all peer reviewed and published articles in academic journals or published related books. Karlstad university library database, Business Source Premier has been used as the major source of searching for secondary sources, and Google academic has also been used for this purpose. The key words being used in searching articles are cross-culture, culture conflicts, cross-cultural communication, Chinese communication, Swedish communication, culture etc.

3.3. Data analysis

Bryman & Bell (2007) suggested one of the data analysis strategies is general strategies of qualitative data analysis. The data analysis is based on our research questions which focus on “how”, “why” and “example”. In the data analysis section, the theories are applied in the collected data to be able to understand the interview results.

According to Bryman & Bell (2007), the analysis starts with a research question, a hypothetical explanation of the questions and proceeds to collect data. From the interview with Chinese and Swedish employees in multinational organizations as well as other materials we collected. From data collection we summarized how employees’ values influenced their acting. According to the theory of communication and cultural dimensions the differences between their behaviors and what are the causes will be analyzed.

We collected 15 interviewees’ responds from Sweden and China. First, all responds from one country were put together and reviewed the comments to the same interviewed questions in order to find out what are the common and major issues they commented. Then we compared responds to the same interviewed questions from both Sweden and
China to see what are the similarities and differences. Last, we analyzed the major issues reflected in their communications according to the theories that are presented in the thesis.

3.4. Validity and reliability

In quality research the reliability and validity is important. According to Bryman & Bell (2007), in qualitative research of reliability and validity have some change meaning than other salience of measurement issues.

In our research study, we have analyzed the different communication ways between Chinese and Swedish people, not only from the surface in different behavior, but also considering the cultural values and communication ways.

The reliability of qualitative research has external reliability and internal reliability. External reliability “is impossible to ‘freeze’ a social setting and circumstances of an initial study to make it replicable in the sense in which the term is usually employed” (Bryman & Bell, 2007: p410). For the external reliability of our research, we chose Chinese and Swedish employees as our focus group, by using the interview questions to interview with all the employees; we would find differences between these two countries. The group of Chinese and Swedish interviewees can be consider as a social setting that can represent the general opinions of two countries. With transitional of society and circumstances, any study can be replicated. Internal reliability point “whether or not, when there is more than one observer, members of the research team agree about what they see and” (Bryman & Bell, 2007: p410). There are two people in this research team; we have same opinion that can help us to coherence and translation of data into categories in order to help us to do our analysis.

The validity of qualitative research has external validity and internal validity. According to Bryman & Bell (2007), between researchers observations and theory ideas there is a good match between them. In our research, we use Hofstede’s cultural dimension theory and Guirdham communication theory in this thesis; it is validity that based on these two theories to design our interview questions, which can answer our
research questions in a precise way. External validity refers “the degree to which findings can be generalized across social settings” (Bryman & Bell, 2007: p410). In this thesis, we use Chinese and Swedish as our samples who can represents their general cultural and communications characteristics. So in the external validity perspective, this research is validity to analysis the culture difference between China and Sweden.

3.5. Critique of qualitative research

According to Bryman & Bell (2007), the common issues with qualitative research are difficult to replicate, too subjective and have problems of generalization.

Qualitative research is too subjective. In qualitative findings too much relies on the researcher’s vision of important issues, also there would be too much personal bias of what the researcher has studied. Qualitative research usually starts with an open-ended style that would narrow down the research question that would make researchers focus on area clues rather than others (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Difficult to replicate, it relies on the researcher’s ingenuity and also it is unstructured. Problems of generalization; it is always restricting to find qualitative investigation. It is hard to find if the findings are generalized since the researcher conducted with small individuals in organization (Bryman & Bell, 2007).
4. Empirics

In this section the data collected from interviews will be presented. The findings will be separated into two parts, Swedish perspective and Chinese perspective. The information of all interviewees regarding age, gender, position etcetera is in the section named “List of interviewees”. Furthermore, the conducted interview questions are found in Appendix 1 (English) and 2 (Chinese). In total, six Swedish employees, nine Chinese employees were interviewed.

4.1. Chinese employee view

Language

The most common mentioned communication barrier among Chinese people is language. Among 9 Chinese interviewees all the Chinese people think language influenced the quality of communication during their daily work. According to the answers, there are two perspectives of language that impact communication, one is when using language, English is not each other’s mother tongue and another is cultural difference causes difficulty understanding the language.

During business communication it is common to have misunderstandings when the mother tongue is not English. Because English is neither China’s nor Sweden’s native language, there will be some barriers when they communicate. One Chinese employee stated: “sometimes Swedish people confused when we say ‘no’, but actually we mean ‘yes’.” (Interview 15). One Chinese worker at a technology company stated: “mainly misunderstandings caused by accent” and another Chinese worker said: “Swedish people’s English have their accent, sometimes it is hard to understand” (interview 12). There are three Chinese people that feel accent is a problem during communication.

Cultural difference caused language misunderstanding. During communication there are some language misunderstandings that are caused by culture. One Chinese worker stated: “in daily business work, Chinese people be used to use daily language to
communicate, to be polite to older people Chinese people used to call them ‘teacher’, instead call their name directly, also Chinese want to show close to other people they calling their colleague with ‘brother’ or ‘sister’, during the daily work most of the Swedish people cannot understand, sometimes they would really think they are siblings or he was a teacher before” (interview 14). Culture differences impact language comprehension, and it also influences quality of work.

Misunderstanding of communication

When asked, Chinese employees stated the misunderstandings happened during the communication with Swedish employees, among 10 interviewees there are 5 Chinese that think there have been misunderstandings (interview 7, 8, 9, 14, 15). Due to culture, values and communication elements, misunderstandings obviously happen. One Chinese employee who is working in a high tech company stated: “once I will have a business trip, my Swedish boss asked me which transport I want to take, airplane or train? I thought he want me to take train in order to save travel costs, but in the end I got known that he want me to take airplane because that is fast way, but my boss did not told me ” (interview 7). There are many factors that can cause misunderstanding in communication, meanwhile misunderstanding would reduce work efficiency and increase working inconvenience. There is another Chinese employee stated: “when Swedish want to deny you, they would not say it thoroughly, when Swedish people disagree your opinions they would not directly tell you that I do not agree with your opinion, they would say I think if you doing this way would be better” (interview 15).

Other factors which would lead to misunderstandings that mentioned by Chinese interviewees is punctual. Punctual would cause misunderstanding and mistrust which would lower the working efficiency. The non-verbal also mentioned by Chinese interviewees that would lead to misunderstandings during working with Swedish colleagues. One of Chinese interviewees stated: “non-verbal is also cause misunderstanding, once I reported project process, some Swedish managers were listening carefully and nod sometimes, I thought they agree my result but in the end I found that they just want to be polite to me. In China nodding means I agree but in Swedish way it is I understand” (interview 11). Also this Chinese interviewee stated
there also have some misunderstandings caused by Chinese way of dealing with others. Chinese people like to use their hospitality to be polite to Swedish colleagues that would easily make Swedish colleagues misunderstanding or mistrust.

**Adjust the way of communication**

In our interview question, we asked if they had developed any communication strategy-adjustment during the work and in communication with each other. Among 10 Chinese interviewees all of them think it is important to change their communication technique when they are in different situations (interview7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15). Appropriate adjustment of communication can help people communicate better. One of the Chinese employees working in one business company stated: “Chinese people used to use phone call to inform someone but in Sweden people used to use email to contact people. So I changed my way in order to fit the Swedish way” (interview 14). Another Chinese interviewee stated: “Swedish people are honest and insist so they think intense emotional is immaturity, so when we have different opinion I will adjustment my way of to discuss with them” (interview 11). Furthermore this employee stated: “Chinese people do not like to have discussion during the meeting or report, they would like to discuss about it after meeting, but Swedish people are opposite, in order to adjust to Swedish people’s way I would ask questions during the meeting.” (interview 11).

**Different opinions handling**

When asked how to resolve issues when you have different opinions with colleagues, it was a unanimous response from all nine Chinese interviewees. Based on Chinese employees’ approaches when they meet different opinions, we focus on two parts, when they have different opinions with their boss and with your colleagues in order to find out the different reactions.

When asked to answer the question, “What would you do if you have different opinions than your manager’s decision?” All the Chinese interviewees stated they will express their views to their boss, but they will follow the decisions if their boss is still adamant of his opinion (interview 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15). One of the Chinese
When interview questions changed to the worker group, Chinese interviewees were asked how they solve problems that arose during team work when the opinions of his or her colleague differ. Among all the Chinese interviewees there are 9 interviewees that states they will try to convince their partner to agree to their way and to finish the job, or try to make an agreement between each other (interview 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15). There is a Chinese interviewee who stated: “I will insist my opinion, but I will follow my partner’s opinion if my partner cannot agree with me in order to use reality to determine who was right” (interview 11).

**Way of thinking**

Based on two countries cultural difference and values, interview questions were related with two countries’ contrast. When the interviewees were asked different ways of thinking of these two countries’ leader’s ways of communication, information sharing was mentioned by Chinese interviewees. Among all the Chinese interviewees, all of them stated that there are huge differences in ways of thinking and communication.

Way of communicating was mentioned most among all the interviewees. Almost all the Chinese employees thought it was easier to communicate with Swedish bosses than Chinese bosses. They think the distance between a Swedish boss and employee is much smaller (interview 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15). Some Chinese interviewees stated that they feel nervous when they communicate with Chinese boss; also they have to find a good way to communicate with Chinese boss (interview 14, 17). One Chinese interviewee stated: “Swedish boss would care about employees’ views; they would like give more suggestions to their employees instead give more command. Chinese boss would give command directly without suggestion” (interview 12). One Chinese employee working in a Swedish company stated: “when Swedish boss criticize employees they would think about employees feelings as well, but Chinese boss would not care” (interview 15) There is another Chinese employee that stated Swedish bosses
would not force their employees to do something, in another way they would help their employees’ daily life (interview 13).

The secondary difference mentioned by Chinese interviewees was way of thinking. Most of the Chinese interviewees stated that Swedish bosses and colleagues have linear thinking; they would express their opinions and feelings directly to their colleague and employees (interview 12, 13, 14, 15).

The third difference mentioned by Chinese interviewees was information sharing. All the Chinese interviewees stated that when their Swedish bosses have working information that might help their employees, they would share it with their employees (interview 12, 13, 14, 15). One interviewee stated that Swedish bosses would not deliberately share working information; they would like their employees to finish their task by themselves, if they get some information unexpectedly, then they would share it (interview 12). One Chinese employee added that when Swedish bosses give you a task, they do not care how you finish it; they just care about the result (interview 13).

4.2. Swedish employees view

“Nothing is impossible but at same time Everything is difficult”

Language is a barrier

English as the communicating language between Swedish and Chinese employees was emphasized by all six interviewees. Generally speaking when Chinese people use English to communicate there is a certain degree of difficulty for swedes to understand. Two of six Swedish interviewees stated that Chinese employee’s English level is one of the major communication obstacles for them to communicate with Chinese (interview 2 & 4). One Swedish project manager strengthened that Chinese employee’s English level is the only major communication obstacle for her to communicate with Chinese (interview 6).

As one project manager commented on the interviewed question “What do you think of the major communication obstacles with Chinese at work?” She said “the language” (interview 6). And the same person added “usually the English language makes it
harder to understand each other, which makes it easier to misunderstand each other.” A Swedish manager who has been worked in China for over seven years said “English is not the mother language for both Swedish and Chinese thus English level is a challenge.” Then he added “basically Swedish people are ok when they speak English” (interview 4).

Some typical practices are illustrated as follows. One interviewee mentioned “‘His’ & ‘her’ (male and female) comes very natural for western people, but is very difficult for Chinese to keep track on” (interview 1). The Swedish manager who is still working in China added “if I ask a question, reply from Chinese is that they use ‘No’ to express ‘Yes’ which makes it very difficult to understand what they mean” (Interview 4). Another interviewee who is a project manager worked in Sweden but has very close contact with a Chinese factory commented to the question regarding the major communication obstacle with Chinese at work is that “One barrier is of course also the level of English spoken, especially if you need to communicate over phone” (interview 2).

**Same words but different meaning**

The response to the question “Have you experienced a different understanding to a certain English word or sentence (assuming English is your communication language) that may be related to cultural differences?” are mostly reflections of interviewee’s work experience during the interaction with Chinese employees. A director who has been working in China for ten years said “Well…when Chinese say ‘no problem’ it is normally just a quick way to stop discussion in my experience. It might not mean that the person agree, or understand, but is a way to end discussion...later the person will go around and ask colleges what I really meant” (interview 1). A project manager gave another example when a Chinese employee says yes. He said “Generally it seems that we look differently on what it means that things are agreed (saying yes). If we agree on something in Sweden it means that it is the way it should be, total alignment. However in China it seems that it means that there is an understanding about what was said but it doesn’t necessarily need to happen or that there were an agreement” (interview 2). A similar case is illustrated by another project manager who is also working quite close with Chinese employees in China. He stated “I think one of the most often occurring
miscommunications we have is when we receive notification from our factory in China that ‘the job is done’ only to discover that it was not actually complete at all. Perhaps this is a difference of opinion regarding what is meant by ‘complete’, or a misunderstanding as to what the task involved and what the end result was supposed to be” (interview 3).

Major communication obstacles with Chinese at work

Other than the Chinese English level that was stated in the “language is a barrier” section already, four of six interviewees mentioned the Chinese do not speak up in meetings or when being asked their opinions (interview 2,3,4,&5), it makes the open discussion quite difficult to proceed and cite one project manager’s words “it is difficult to get an open discussion in groups. I find that workshops or information meetings in big groups are quite useless since Chinese are not used to speaking up and air their opinion” (interview 2). A similar opinion was stated by another project manager he said “especially in phone conferences with China, is that I experience that Chinese staff do not speak up – especially if there is a westerner in the room with them. As a result, important feedback and inputs are not provided in the meeting, and often escalated through other channels instead of addressing them in the meeting” (interview 3). The first one added his personal feeling to this situation he experienced “It can be quite frustrating when you are in a discussion and you expect an open mind but you realize after a while that they are conveying their managers opinion rather than their own” (interview 2). He brought up another issue which is related to open discussion, that is revealed the relationship between managers and employees are hierarchy.

Two of six interviewees directly pointed out the hierarchy relationship in Chinese organization. And another two interviewees indirectly mentioned this issue by their examples. One director answered “There is a lot of the not known hierarchy between different departments, Chinese managers vs. employees, untold relationship, Guanxi, that we will never understand in detail” (interview 1). One project manager gave an example described it as “I experienced occasions where project members agreed in the project but when their manager had a different opinion they would change their action” (interview 2). He continued “Generally I would say that Chinese expect more
information on what to do from their manager and what their manager says is a very important to define their action”(interview 2). Another project manager’s comment reflected the same thing but from another view “I think Chinese do not dare to take initiative they would rather wait for somebody else to do it. They would rather to wait for you to ask them to do it” (interview 5).

Adjustment for communication strategy
All six Swedish interviewees answered “yes”, means they all have made some adjustment in their communication with Chinese employees (interview 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). Four out of six of them stated the similar opinion which is taking away all unnecessary expressions and ask direct questions instead. Director said “When explaining what we want to do, best way is to skip explaining why you want a certain thing done, but only focus on explaining what you want. Keep English simple, exclude all unnecessary expressions, focusing on important part (skip the polite talks) for efficient communication” (interview 1). One project manager described that “I find that I can achieve better results by asking direct questions to different individuals, rather than general questions addressed to a group” (interview 3). Three of six interviewees mentioned to make sure Chinese employees understand what they said they repeat the message to double check. One project manager said “yes I have. I adapt my English pronunciation and try to use more simple words. Also I make sure to repeat the message from different angles to make sure that they have understood and that they agree what needs to be done” (interview 2). Similar expressions from another project manager “much clearer communication for what I want and need double check that Chinese colleagues have understood correctly” (interview 8). Except for keeping communication simple, direct and double check, one interviewee added “I also try to avoid having expats and other westerners in the room” (interview 3).

How to handle when having different opinion to manager’s decision?
When the question:”when you have a different opinion to your manager’s decision, would you talk to your manager directly, or do you usually just do as your manager say even when you don’t agree?” was asked, all Swedish employees who work in Sweden expressed the same attitude I speak to my manager directly and express my point of
view, even if he/she does not agree (interview 2, 3, 5 & 5). However the answers from another two Swedish interviewees, one director and one manager, have been working in China for seven and ten years respectively and they are still working in China seemed to have more to say. The director gave a comparison and said “There is one big difference. In China you do what your manager tells you, but in Sweden you can often challenge the manager and do what you think is best (without any risk for later problems) > Managers in Sweden are more vague, flexible in describing what they want, andsometimes don’t care about HOW it is done. In China you do exactly how the manager has told you what to do (even if you sometimes believe it is wrong way)” (interview 1). The other manager first said “this is an interesting question!” and then he continued “during my time in China, I think I have adjusted to Chinese way, I try to make myself understand, but in the end even I don’t understand maybe I just follow what my manager said” (interview 4).

Relevant to this interview question, one Swedish project manager added his comment according to him it is through his observations” I have noticed that the relationship between an employee and a Chinese manager is one of hierarchy. An employee does not (or very rarely) question his/her manager, or enter into discussions to prove that their manager is wrong” (interview 3). In the end he added “perhaps this is changing with the younger generation in China, where people are more open to discussion and willing to question things”.

**How to handle when having different opinions to colleagues?**

When having asked the question:”if you and your Chinese colleagues have different opinion, will you try to convince your partner?” Five out of six interviewees said “yes”, they will try. But one of these five also mentioned an example that he has to give in sometimes to his Chinese colleague who is also a manager so that the Chinese manager can take more responsibility instead of relying on him for everything. This is from one of the Swedish interviewees who have been working in China for seven years (interview 4). The other Swedish interviewee, who has worked in China for ten years summarized:”To generalize, in China this is not expected if you are a manager, then you are always right. In Sweden there is always a discussion to convince and all should
agree upon all solutions” (interview 1). Four interviewees show similar thought on this issue, one said “I always try to keep an open mind, and will listen to the other person’s opinion (whether it is with a Chinese person or anyone else)” (interview 3). Another project manager even developed his own communication steps to solve the issue he explained” when in discussions I find it more effective to try to reach a level of understanding regarding the circumstances and background for opinion first. Then you agree on what we want to achieve. After this you can discuss how you best reach it. If you don’t follow these steps there is a big risk that you will never reach an agreement or understanding of why we need to do a certain thing” (interview 2).
5. Analysis

In this section the empirical findings will be evaluated based on the theoretical framework which is introduced earlier, cultural dimensions, cross-cultural communication and culture of both Sweden and China, our own reflections will also be presented. Actually the interview results gave us many aspects of reflections, however due to the scope of our thesis we decided to focus on the most important issues that concerned in the cross-cultural communication that are emphasized in the interviews. These issues are English language barrier and the culture impact, open discussion, cross-cultural communication caused misunderstanding, and the different handling methods when people hold different opinions and some other typical issues.

English language barrier is analyzed by general communication and culture specific barriers that are presented under communication theory; the cultural impact is analyzed with the support of both Chinese and Swedish cultural overview. Open discussion is analyzed with the theory support of cultural characteristics, power distance indicator and high-low context communication differences between Sweden and China. In the communication misunderstanding section, theories being used are: nonverbal communication, power distance, high and low context, individualist and collectivist. In the different opinions handling section, individualism versus collectivist and power distance theories are used to support the analysis. In the way of thinking and communication part, power distance and individual versus collectivist theories are used to support the analysis.

5.1. Language barrier and culture impact

Out of our expectation, however, in our interview all employees no matter if Chinese or Swedish all commented that language is still a big challenge. English language barrier was mentioned by all interviewees. As both parties said English is not the mother tongue for either of them, thus the misunderstanding due to the language is a major obstacle between them. For Chinese employees, they think the accent of some of Swedish employees makes it difficult to understand. For Swedish employees, the overall English level of Chinese employees is what they think the
biggest language obstacle. This problem is in line with the research finding by (Guirdham, 1999) that when people speak different languages language can cause communication obstacles. It is true that Swedish and Chinese are the native languages of the host countries respectively, even though they use intermediate English to communicate in business. Besides spoken language, some Chinese interviewees mentioned the nonverbal language caused misunderstanding as well. According to Knapp (1980), around 65 to 90% of communication is nonverbal, body language; vocal qualities, space behaviors and greeting behaviors are mentioned. That is to say the language barrier is caused by both verbal and nonverbal languages between Swedish and Chinese employees.

Furthermore, it is argued by Guirdham (1999), messages are to be sent and received, but meanings are not. Meaning requires the communicator’s own interpretation and inference. Culture barriers have big impact on how communicators interpret and infer the meaning during cross-cultural communication, therefore the misunderstanding rate is relatively high. Chinese prefer to follow Confucians value which has been introduced earlier in the Chinese culture section, and communicate in a harmonious environment devoid of conflicts. One example, one Swedish interviewee mentioned when Chinese employees say “no problem”, “it is just a quick way to stop discussion in my experience, it might not mean that the person agree, or understand, but is a way to end discussion...later the person will go around and ask colleges what I really mean” (interview 1). Chinese culture indicates it could have many meanings, to avoid conflicts as they don’t want to argue with other people; acceptance of the hierarchical management because this Swedish person is a director in the company; or if they show that they don’t understand they might feel as if they are “losing face”, and if they don’t want to challenge other people they might feel as if they are “giving face” to others. All these thought processes are interrelated under Chinese cultural influence meanwhile affect the way of working.

In short summary, other than language itself as a barrier, the Chinese and Swedish culture has also caused hurdles in their communication at work because the way of communicating is a reflection of their culture respectively.
5.2. Open discussion

Missing open discussion with Chinese employees is reflected in lines from all Swedish interviewees. Some statements are “it is difficult to get an open discussion in groups. I find that workshops or information meetings in big groups are quite useless since Chinese are not used to speaking up and air their opinion. It is more important to build a smaller close team so that they actually have a reason to go against their manager over you” (interview 2); “especially in phone conferences with China, is that I experience that Chinese staff do not speak up – especially if there is a westerner in the room with them. As a result, important feedback and inputs are not provided in the meeting, and often escalated through other channels instead of addressing them in the meeting” (interview 3). However, only one Chinese interviewee mentioned that he noticed that Swedish prefer an open discussion way of working instead of just sending or receiving orders from either communicator. This problem was also considered as a major communication obstacle with Chinese at work by Swedish interviewees but only very few Chinese employees notice this difference.

The reason behind this issue has many concerns. Firstly it is easily connected to the differences of Swedish and Chinese culture. Swedish culture is known to lack hierarchy, whereas Chinese culture is typical of hierarchy management. Swedish culture provides an open and free communication between managers and subordinates for they regard the value of everyone is equal. While on the other hand, Chinese culture values hierarchy, the “Wu Lun” five basic relationships is used as a guiding principle. And according to researcher Lockett (1988), everyone in an organization should be aware of their position, mangers expect to be respected and obeyed by subordinates. Subordinates are trained to listen to managers and lower level managers should follow upper level managers. As observed by the Swedish director who has been working in China for ten years “In China you do what your manager tells you, but in Sweden you can often challenge the manager and do what you think is best (without any risk for later problems). In China you do exactly how the manager has told you what to do (even if you sometimes believe it is wrong way)” (interview 1). If employees knew that they
have to follow what their managers ask them to do, why bother arguing with the managers? Obedience and waiting for instruction by managers have become the Chinese employees’ consciousness without awareness in itself. However for people from other cultures, in this context Swedish, they can easily have the impression that Chinese staff do not speak up, they do not dare to take initiative they would rather wait for somebody else to tell them what to do and how to do it. This issue is partly caused by people who are afraid of power distance. According to researcher Hofstede et al. (2010), China is on the top of the power distance indicator list.

It was strengthened by the Swedish interviewees that it is counterproductive to engage in group discussion with Chinese employees, especially in larger groups. According to Swedish interviewees’ experiences, it is more efficient to build a smaller close team to discuss with Chinese employees. We argue that this issue is caused by the different ways of communication, according to Hall (1990) theory of high-context and low context communication: China was pointed out with high-context culture while Sweden has low-context culture. The characteristic for high-context communication is people tend to use indirect messages and not sharing enough information in public. Therefore Swedish interviewees found out that Chinese do not speak up in groups, the reason might be they do not want to share their thoughts with others in public. They prefer to build personal long term relationships before they would show trust to others. That can also explain why (interview 3) Chinese employees do not address issues in meetings, but spread them through other channels, the channels they trust and have relationships with. Confucianism thinking is another factor affecting the Chinese way of communicating. If they show differing opinions in public, they are very concerned about losing face while cautious of others losing face at the same time.

On the other hand, in low-context communication cultures like Sweden, people prefer to exchange messages clearly with open discussion. Clear expression is Sweden’s way of communicating (Richardson & Smith 2007). Thus all Swedish interviewees commented that they feel it is hard to have open discussion with Chinese. They are expecting direct information sharing in organized group discussions but this is not high-context culture communication behaviour.
5.3. Communication misunderstanding

When interviewees were asked about miscommunication they encountered in the workplace due to cross cultural communication, the responses from Swedish interviewees focused more on communication misunderstanding, nonverbal misunderstanding and communication context problem. The responses from Chinese interviewees focused more on communication misunderstanding, nonverbal misunderstanding and working time.

From our findings we can see that the most important problem is communication misunderstanding amongst Swedish people. Most of the Swedish people point on clarity of working information. According to Hofstede et al. (2010) research of cultural dimensions, the characteristics of Swedish culture dimensions belong to low power distance, high individualism; according to Hall (1990), Sweden belongs to low context. Both the project manager and the director agree that in the small power distance situations, both the boss and employees treat each other as equals. Swedish employees have an open working environment and have flexible working times in a friendly atmosphere; Swedish employees can have more discussions with their bosses than Chinese employees. According to Hofstede et al. (2010), research of cultural dimensions, the characteristics of Chinese cultural dimensions belong to large power distance and collectivism. Hall (1990) states China belongs to high context communication. Furthermore, Chinese culture dictates that Chinese employees should listen to their boss’s orders and accept the existential inequality between different levels. Swedish employees expect to be consulted; Chinese people just do their work that their managers told them to do. Swedish managers expect Chinese employees to take full responsibility for their work. During the business communication, Swedish employees often feel confused when Chinese employees do not divulge enough business information. According to data, nonverbal can also lead to communication misunderstanding. According to Hargie & Dickson (1994), nonverbal behavior also used to complement the spoken word. Nonverbal would give listeners some effective ideas from the speaker. Also, nonverbal behavior can provide feedback to the interaction of proper communication. There are nonverbal misunderstandings between
Swedish and Chinese employees, Swedish managers think Chinese employees do not have much facial expression during communication thus causing misunderstanding (interview 2, 4, 5), but Swedish people want more facial and nonverbal expression to have feedback interaction.

Comparing the two countries cultural dimensions, besides communication misunderstanding, flexible working time is appreciated by Chinese interviewees. Sweden as one of the individualist countries is more considerate of their own private life. According to Daun (2005), the characteristics of Swedish culture are that they have a definite line between work and private life. Swedish employees in the individualist culture act on their need, their work should combine self interest and the company’s interest together. Swedish employees focus on their working time and private life (Hofstede et al., 2010). For Swedish employees there is no work after they finished working time. Chinese as one of the collectivism culture, they focus on whole group’s interest, they are the employee who belongs to the group, and they consider group interests more than their individual interest. In Chinese company most of Chinese employees take their private time to doing company’s business.

5.4. Different opinions handling

When Swedish interviewees were asked how they react when they disagree with their manager’s decisions, all the Swedish interviewees mentioned that they will talk to their manager directly and try to compromise. When Chinese interviewees face this problem, most of them mentioned that they would try to communicate with their manager, but in the end they would follow their manager’s decision. When both Swedish and Chinese interviewees were asked how they handle differences of opinion between themselves and their working partner, almost all of the interviewees mentioned that they would find a common way to solve it. Employees from both countries ostensibly have the same respond to the problem, but two countries interviewees have different actions to solve this problem.
The Swedish working environment is more open with the low hierarchy in organization, in Swedish culture they advocate equality, and they pursue average distribution of the workload. Rooted in the Swedish way of thinking, Swedish organizations have their business culture of small power distance and individualism. In Swedish organizations privileges and status symbols are not popular. When Swedish employees’ opinions differ with their manager’s decision, they would choose to talk to them and try to make a common opinion. They think managers decisions are supposed to rely on their own experience and on employees. Managers should be accessible to subordinates, and employees expect managers to consult them before they make their own decisions (Hofstede et al., 2010).

On the contrary, Chinese organizations have large power distance in their business culture. From findings we can see that most of the Chinese interviewees chose to talk to their manager directly when they are not in agreement with managers’ decisions, but most of them would follow managers’ decision anyway. In a large power distance country, managers and employees treat each other unequally. Chinese employees expect managers to tell them what to do. Superiors expect subordinates to respect them. Compared with Swedish employees, they have same reaction when they encounter the same problem, but they have different ways to resolve the issue. According to Hofstede et al. (2010) research, power distance and collectivism tend to be negatively correlated, large power distance countries are more often collectivist, and small power distance countries are more individualist. People in one culture who depend in groups are usually dependent on power figures (Hofstede et al., 2010). In Swedish enterprises, employees want to be equal and prove their capability, but in Chinese business culture, superiors expect subordinates to follow their decision and contribute their capability to the company.

When both Swedish and Chinese interviewees were asked how to solve the problem when have different opinion during the team work, both countries interviewees mentioned that they will try to convince others and find a common way. From the findings we can see that employees’ from different business cultures are always try to achieve their purpose in order to promote their personal development.
5.5. Other aspect: way of thinking and communication

Having discussed the misunderstanding of communication and factors behind ways to solving different opinions, interviewees were asked about comparing between Chinese and Swedish managers. According to the findings, way of communication and way of thinking have big differences between them.

There are big culture differences between China and Sweden, by Chinese interviewees mentioned, Swedish organizations have a more open working environment, and employees can feel strong respect from everyone, small power distance makes work more efficient. The working environment is more relaxed between superiors and subordinates; subordinates can have more discussion and challenge with their superiors. Within the large power distance working environment, Swedish would obviously see that people should respect their superiors. Influenced by Confucianism, Chinese enterprises have a typical hierarchy influence on everyone. Managers should lead the whole team that includes technicians, employees’ service managers to finish the project. By contrary, Swedish enterprises managers working in order to service technicians need. Communication context influence by cultures, countries like Sweden belong to high context culture that focus on individual’s value, in order to improve work efficiency they use direct communication to communicate frankly with others. Relaxed and direct ways of thinking and communication were mentioned by Chinese interviewees. In Chinese culture that belongs to low context communication way, in order to avoid loss of face and embarrassing situations, Chinese people use vague and ambiguous ways to communicate, by using different situations to express their context. Swedish managers expect clear feedback, but most of the time the answers they received are has ambiguous.

The major findings are summarized in the following table 1:
Table 1: The major findings concerning cross-cultural communication between Chinese and Swedish employees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>China</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture differences</td>
<td>• Socio-democratic society, advocate individual equity;</td>
<td>Confucian values:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cultural differences result in different interpretation of the same</td>
<td>• Show more respect to people who are older and accept hierarchical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>words</td>
<td>management;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Group orientation is superior to individual orientation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The importance of face.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The importance of relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power distance</td>
<td>• Swedish managers behave like one of the team members, and show more</td>
<td>• Chinese employees think it is easier to communicate with Swedish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>equal treatment to subordinates.</td>
<td>managers but harder to communicate with Chinese managers, because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Swedish employees dare to argue with the manager and express their</td>
<td>Chinese managers seem stricter to subordinates and feel that they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>own thoughts.</td>
<td>are superior;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Chinese employees tend to follow the manager’s decision without</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>argument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism versus collectivism</td>
<td>• Strong sense of individualism</td>
<td>• Strong sense of collectivism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-context versus low-context</td>
<td>• Swedish prefer direct communicating</td>
<td>• Chinese prefer an indirect way of communicating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Swedish prefer an open discussion with all people involved</td>
<td>• More efficient to build a smaller close team to discuss with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chinese employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language usage</td>
<td>• In general Swedish is more skilled in English language</td>
<td>• English skill is still a barrier for Chinese to communicate freely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situations Communication strategies</td>
<td>• Communicator will adjust the way of communicating depending on the</td>
<td>• Communicator will adjust the way of communicating depending on the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>situations but with the influence of their culture.</td>
<td>situations but with the influence of their culture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Conclusion

With the economic globalization China still remains the most popular place for many other countries investments destination, the business cooperation among China and Sweden is observed increasing every year. Besides technical issues, economic issues and others that concern business performance, cross-cultural communication is drawing attention from all parties.

A study of major issues concerning cross-cultural communication at work between Chinese and Swedish employees is conducted in the form of interview. Results shown from the empirical findings from both Swedish and Chinese employees show that the major reported issues are as followings:

- Language, English as their communication language is still a big communication barrier among Chinese and Swedish employees at work;
- Cultural differences caused different interpretation of the same words;
- Chinese prefer an indirect way of communication or in a private way, whereas Swedish prefer a direct communication and open discussion, thus leading to insufficient communication;
- The way of handling conflicting opinion with managers is different between Chinese and Swedish employees. Chinese employees tend to follow the manager’s decision without argument, Swedish employees dare to argue with the manager and express their own thoughts.
- Chinese employees think it is easier to communicate with Swedish managers but harder to communicate with Chinese managers, because Chinese managers seem stricter to subordinates and feel that they are superior, but Swedish managers behave like one of the team members, and show more equal treatment to subordinates.

Based on interview findings and connected with theoretical framework, it was found that the centered issues among Chinese and Swedish employees during their interaction at work are around the language barrier, Chinese and Swedish culture characteristics, power distance degree differs and high & low communication ways differ. The
remaining cultural dimensions have influence on Swedish and Chinese employees’ cross-cultural communication but they do not have as much impact as the centered ones.

Regarding language, English is neither Chinese nor Swedish mother language, they emphasize the language is still a big barrier during their communication. In general Chinese employee’s English level needs further improvement.

We argue that the cultural differences are the critical factors that affect the communication behaviors among Chinese and Swedish employees at work. The primary factor is the cultural characteristics of China and Sweden. As described earlier, Chinese culture is heavily affected by Confucius thinking, following the five defined relationships. To a certain extent, this thinking forms the hierarchy system of Chinese society and organizations. Furthermore, it is in line with results of Hofstede et al. (2010) research finding regarding high power distance in Chinese culture. It explained Chinese employees have the tendency of following orders instead of showing their real thoughts to show respect to managers, to maintain a harmonious environment. On the opposite side of things, Swedish culture advocates equality, this is not only reflected in the social system but also in business organizations. Lack of hierarchy, low power distance between manager and subordinates, thus employee dare to show their opinion and dare to argue with managers to seek a better solution.

Further, the different way of communication is particularly relevant for distinguishing cultures. China was pointed out with high-context culture while Sweden is with low-context communication culture. The distinct difference in cross-cultural communication is that Chinese employee appear not to express their opinion directly and not share information publicly, they prefer to communicate in group they have built relationship with and trust. However Swedish employees are used to exchanging messages directly in an open discussion without worrying about any risk for later problems. Thus an open discussion in a big group is not appropriate for Chinese employees but is an effective communication way for Swedish employees.
Therefore, be aware of the major issues concerning cross-cultural communication at work during the interactions between Chinese and Swedish employees and understand the underlying causes will be in favor of improving communication between them. Though this study was conducted between Swedish and Chinese employees, we believe it can also be helpful for people with similar cultural background.

Based on the reflections of Swedish interviewees and Chinese interviewees, theoretical framework and our analysis, we would like to give some suggestions in order to improve cross-cultural communication in the interaction between Swedish employees and Chinese employees.
7. Further research

To understand and evaluate cross-cultural communication between Swedish and Chinese employees, this thesis presents the view mainly from Hofstede et al. (2010) five cultural dimensions and Guirdham (1999) communication across culture theory. Firstly, there can be more issues that are not explored in our interview yet, after all our interview samples are limited on both number of interviewees and variety of multinational companies. Thus more interviewees and diverse multinational organizations can be targeted in order to get more feedback to make sure important issues are not missed and maybe new issues can be found as well.

Secondly, organization structure can also contribute to cross-cultural communication. Organizations in Sweden and China have different structures. Chinese organizations normally run with hierarchy structure while Swedish organizations are observed as operating with a flat structure. However the organization structure subject is not deeply discussed in this paper, therefore this can be something to be investigated further in the study of cross-cultural communication field.

Last but not least, individual personality also plays an important role in cross-cultural communication. Swedish and Chinese individual’s personalities and their influence on the cross-cultural communication can be studied further.
Reference List


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbr</th>
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</table>
Appendix 1

Questions about your direct or indirect experience about the cross-cultural communication issues occurred at work during the interaction with Chinese people. 
Gender: Age: Position: Industry:

1. Have you experienced a different understanding to a certain English word or sentence (assuming English is your communication language) that may related to cultural differences? (i.e, when a Chinese say ‘no problem’, does it really mean no problem by your experience?)

2. What do you think of the major communication obstacles with Chinese at work? Give examples…

3. What kind of miss-interpretation happened at work caused by cross-cultural communication with Chinese people?

4. Have you developed any communication strategy-adjustments during the work and in communication with Chinese?

5. When you have a different opinion to your manager’s decision, would you talk to your manager directly, or do you usually just do as your manager say even when you don’t agree?

6. If you and your Chinese colleague are working together to solve a specific problem, but you have different opinions and you think your opinion is right, will you try to convince your partner to accept your opinion? Give examples from your personal experiences.

7. When your (nearest/direct) manager is Chinese, is there generally a communication problem between you and your manager? Is there a difference in view of information sharing and the way of thinking? Give examples!
Appendix 2

回忆下你自己经历的或间接了解到的，和瑞典人在工作交往中可能是由于文化不同遇到的沟通问题。

1. 你遇到过什么沟通问题你认为是由于文化不同造成对语言的不同理解？（比如，对方说“no problem”，是否意味着的确没有问题？）

2. 你认为和瑞典人在工作中沟通的障碍主要有哪些？举例说明

3. 举几个例子，你和瑞典人在工作中因为沟通发生的误会？

4. 当你在工作中和瑞典人沟通时你觉得你的沟通方式是否因情况不同而做出相应的调整？

5. 你对领导的决定有不同意见，你会选择直接向领导反映还是虽然不同意但还是按照领导的决定执行？

6. 如果你和瑞典同事一起负责解决一个问题，但是你们意见不统一，你觉得你的想法是对的。你会试图说服对方接受你的意见，还是不管对方接受与否坚持自己的想法去做？

7. 当你的直接经理是中国人或是瑞典人时，你和领导的沟通会有什么不同，信息共享方面和思维方式有什么不同？

谢谢合作！