Lesson learned?
The utilization of learning in cross-border M&A integration

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ABSTRACT

Our purpose is to understand how learnings are drawn from previous experiences of cross-border acquisition integration, to later be utilized for integration of subsequent acquisitions. Elaborately, we intend to empirically study how learnings from previous endeavors are captured and built upon. Thus, there are two research questions given the sequence: learnings are first captured, then utilized. The study aims to extend current body of literature and deepening the understanding on deliberate learning through case study aspects. To answer this, we have constructed two research questions:

(1) How can learnings be captured from previous experience in integration after cross-border acquisition?

(2) How can learnings from previous experience of cross-border acquisition integration be utilized in subsequent deals?

The founding pillars of our literature review are perspectives on M&A and perspectives on learning. More specifically, the first perspective focuses on cross-border aspects and post-merger integration phases. Regarding the perspective on learning, our study particularly focuses on deliberate learning theory. Beyond named focus is dynamic capabilities, serial acquirers and previous experience discussed due to its connection to deliberate learning theory and our study. The literature review concludes in a theoretical tool, which summarizes the literature and is portrayed through a model.

The case study method was constructed with a qualitative and interpretive approach, which we found appropriate to reach a deeper in-depth understanding regarding the purpose and to answer our research questions. Six semi-structured interviews with managers were conducted to understand how they operated. We collected primary data by using snowball sampling and received secondary data of documentation from the studied firm. Further, this was qualitatively analyzed from a coding procedure of categories.

Our findings disclose how previous experience of post-merger integrations in cross-border acquisition is deliberately captured by our case company through learning mechanisms discussed in deliberate learning theory. The mechanisms are accordingly articulation, codification, sharing and internalizing. However, the findings disclosed a discrepancy between the literature and our empirical case due to the rotation of integration team members, which caused a disruption in sharing and internalizing of previous experience.

The contributions are both theoretical and managerial. First, the theoretical contribution is given through our revised theoretical tool, in which the findings regarding the different mechanisms are discussed and elaborated. The managerial findings provide recommendations in the assembling of an M&A integration team to preserve experience from previous endeavors and disseminate to new members.

Keywords: Mergers and acquisitions, deliberate learning, post-merger integration, previous experience, cross-border, cross-border M&A
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1. Introduction

In the following chapter, we present the background to this study, together with the problematizing. We identify the research gaps in connection to our outlaid argumentation. Further, the study’s purpose and research questions are presented which are inferred of the background, problematizing and identified research gaps. Lastly, we briefly present our selected case and how the study will chiefly be conducted. Also, our theoretical point of view is presented.

The total value of all cross-border mergers and acquisition (M&A) deals between 2004 and 2015 was reported to exceed $5 trillion dollars (Xie, Reddy & Liang, 2017, p. 128). Already back in 1998, the total worth of all cross-border M&As were between $1.6 trillion dollars to 2.55 trillion dollars (Very & Schweiger, 2001, p. 11; Schweiger & Goulet, 2000, p. 61). Counting total value of all deals in the 1980s, this accumulated value was surpassed, financially, in 1997 alone, given the worth of deals made that year (Shimizu, Hitt, Vaidyanath & Pisano, 2004, p. 308). Furthermore, all M&As made between 1998 and 2004 were of higher combined value than all deals accomplished dating back to 1970s (Shimizu et al., 2004, p. 308). All numbers presented above underlines the magnitude of strategy M&A’s constitutes. Scratching on the surface of astonishing numbers, however, reveals a dull reality of struggle for all engaging parties in such deals, which we will discuss further down.

As can be interpreted by the numbers above, acquisitions are a common – sometimes, even necessary (see e.g. Kim, Halebian & Finkelstein (2011, p. 26) – strategy by which to obtain organizational and financial growth. Öberg and Tarba (2015, p. 469) argue that firms have engaged in such internationalization increasingly often, with different motives depending on firms’ situation. However, before elaborating on motives, the history of such strategy can be distinguished through six different waves (Yaghoubi, Yaghoubi, Locke & Gibb, 2016, p. 148): (1) The “Monopolies” wave between 1897 and 1904; (2) The “Oligopolies” wave between 1916 and 1929; (3) The “Diversification” wave between 1965 and 1969; (4) The “Hostile” wave between 1981-1989; (5) The “Related Mergers” wave between 1993 and 2000; (6) The “Global” wave between 2003 and 2007. Additional to this, two major trends are spotted by Andrade, Mitchell and Stafford (2001, p. 104) in that deregulations were one important factor for the explosion in the 1990s, as is illustrated by the numbers above. Also, the authors found compensation in forms of stocks, instead of payment in cash (2001, p. 105). Notably, the researchers’ data collection ends in 2007, by the time worldwide financial crisis occurred. Reconnecting to motives, there are different motives preceding acquisitions. In their article of desperation to grow, Kim et al. (2011, p. 27) suggest firms who are either lacking benchmarked (to competitors) growth or declining growth prior to historic growth are more inclined to purchase. Consequently, firms which suffers from each form of lack of growth may become desperate to acquire growth from outside – either to strengthen one’s own R&D or strengthen one’s market position. Bohlin, Daley and Thomson (2000, p. 225) suggest that motives such as synergy possibilities, market share increase or weakening competitors may precede the decision to acquire. Even though the motives seem justified, positive results rarely reveals.

researchers posit different percentage and various explanations for failure – since failure itself is explicit but vague. For example, Sarala (2010, p. 38) states that 75% of all M&As miss-out to realize their pre-set goals for the deal. King et al. (2004, p. 198) argue that in some cases, financial performance (i.e. return on investment) following an acquisition announcement is equal to none, or even in particular cases negative. Following previous suggestion, the concerns of achieving intentions and meet expectations are further underlined to represent a failure rate of 50% deals, reaching heights up to 80% (Budhwar et al., 2009, p. 90). More specifically, it occurs, as the post-merger integration phase is especially chargeable for these failure rates (Weber & Tarba, 2011, p. 203; Schweiger & Goulet, 2000, p. 61; Shimizu et al., 2004, p. 309). Hence, these numbers are staggering, since the frequency of deals are increasing. We will delimit our thesis on the post-merger integration phase, because of above-mentioned importance, thus not shed light on antecedents before acquisitions, e.g. prospecting, due diligence or financial assessment.

Post-merger integration could be regarded as first process to start post deal closure, when the signing is done (Steigenberger, 2017, p. 409). This stage has been highlighted as toughest in the process, and most crucial for a deal to try realizing some prospecting synergies and objectives prior to closure (Öberg & Tarba, 2015, p. 472; Galpin & Herndon, 2008, p. 4; Ai & Tan, 2017, p. 648). Trying to understand why post-merger integration composes high complexity, research has examined different variables moderating integration performance (Schweiger & Goulet, 2000, p. 62). However, complexity is inevitably and can thus not be distinguished – only handled more or less successfully. Lauser (2010, p. 7) elaborates on the matter by stating interrelationship between hard factors (i.e. price, abnormal returns) and soft factors (i.e. culture, knowledge transfer) as variables make causality hard to define clearly. In their study to uncover some unresolved areas in post-merger integration, Stahl et al. (2013, p. 335) list four potential subjects, which need further attention: linkage between pre-merger process and post-merger integration, role of culture, assessment of performance and what role prior acquisition experience has and how it affects subsequent acquisitions. Especially the latter one, prior experience – and related knowledge – is according to Ai and Tan (2017, p. 648) particularly underresearched. Thus, we will review that further below.

Instinctively, logic makes one feel experience should have positive impact on performance; the more an athlete exercise, the better she will be in her discipline. However, same logic is not applicable in an organizational context concerning the relationship between experience and performance in acquisitions (Barkema & Schijven, 2008, p. 595). Instead, there are mainly three overall findings in research: a positive relationship between experience and performance (Barkema, Bell & Pennings, 1996, p. 164); a U-shaped relationship (Halebian & Finkelstein, 1999, p. 51); a nonsignificant relationship (Zollo & Singh, 2004, p. 1251). Moreover, it has been discussed if learning results automatically after accomplishment, i.e. learn by doing, as an effortless outcome simply by undertaking complex tasks, by which acquisitions would qualify as such (Collins et al., 2009, p. 1330). However, this line of argumentation has been considered too vague, for simply “learn-by-doing” does not render outcome given acquisitions’ embedded complexity (Zollo & Singh, 2004, p. 1253). Elaborately, Zollo and Singh (2004, p. 1253) reach the conclusion that deliberate learning efforts needs to be put in place, which implies in-depth mechanisms to moderate learning in order to enhance performance.
1.1 Cross-border M&A
Cross-border mergers and acquisitions have grown to be one prominent strategy to globally expand a firm and reach new markets and customers (Hitt & Pisano, 2003, p. 133). The term could be defined as Reddy (2015, p. 4) emphasizes: “Simply, a merger or acquisition involves at least two companies from two different nations” and “[…] an acquire firm and a target firm whose headquarters are located in different home countries”. This creates differences between domestic and international M&As and capabilities of operating in different countries. In their meta-analysis, Collins et al. (2009, p. 1329) imply cross-border M&As have not been given the appropriate attention in correlation to its prevalence. Fundamental differences highlighted between domestic and international M&As is for example challenges in cultural differences, different laws and socioeconomic conditions related to the fact that a company will operate in an unfamiliar setting (Very & Schweiger, 2001, p. 15). Cross-border acquisition could therefore be seen as more demanding. Very and Schweiger (2001, p. 20) further tell that target country experience, or the lack thereof, is an issue in the acquisition process, and will impact the nature of the problems more than the classification of domestic and cross-border acquisitions itself.

The research on M&As is commonly perceived to be extensive, nevertheless authors tell that the area of cross-border acquisitions is not that voluminous (Collins et al. 2009, p. 1333). Xie et al. (2017, p.129) give an example that between the years of 2005 and 2014, the total sum of all M&As, 100 thousand were constituted as cross-border M&As with a transaction value above 5 trillion US dollars. Cross-border mergers and acquisitions have been found historically, also enlightened earlier above, as a known strategy during centuries (Shimizu et al., 2004, p. 308; Yaghoubi et al., 2016, p. 148). Thus, the strategic practices of decision makers shifted rapidly in their view of the early twentieth century and became more complaisant for spreading the M&A strategy across borders (Hitt & Pisano, 2003, p. 133). Moreover, over 40 percent of the mergers and acquisitions that occurred in the millennium-shift (1999-2000) were acquisitions with headquarters in different geographic locations (Hitt & Pisano, 2003, p. 133). Further, global expansion has been since it appeared, according to Hitt and Pisano (2003, p. 133), beneficial because: “Cross-border acquisitions provide the most rapid means of establishing an international presence in specific markets and as such have become a popular mode of global expansion for firms”. Henceforth, these authors shed light on strategic motives for cross-border acquisitions for multinational companies as the outcomes could render firms to strengthening their competitive advantages in their core business (Kang & Johansson, 2000, p. 7). Hitt and Pisano (2003, p. 133) emphasize opportunities of diversification of activities geographically and that firms can gain valuable resources as new knowledge – by crossing borders.

As mentioned in the background, we will focus on the post-merger integration phase. Accordingly, integration might vary immensely and shape differently depending on what strategy is chosen to tackle such process. Every acquisition is the other unlike – in the sense of efforts needed to be put in or expectations of what to gain (Ellis & Lamont, 2004, p. 84). In order to reduce the inbound complexity of integration, researchers have for years developed different approaches to guide practitioners in their search for excellence, and extend M&A research (Steigenberg, 2017, p. 409). Namely, Angwin and Meadows (2015, p. 237) highlight three noticeable integration frameworks that stand out, including the most prominent typology of M&A research: Haspeslagh and Jemison (1991); Nahavandi and Malekzadeh (1988); and Marks and Mirvis (2001). Firstly, the framework
by Haspeslagh and Jemison is derived from a firm’s need of autonomy and strategic interdependence, which renders in a 2x2 framework through: “Preservation” – Thigh need of autonomy and low need for interdependency; “Absorption” – low level of autonomy and high need for interdependency; “Symbiotic” – high level for both factors; “Holding” – low level for both factors (Angwin & Meadows, 2015, p. 236; Ellis & Lamont, 2004, p. 84). Second, the approach Nahavandi and Malekzadeh present focuses on cultural dimensions, with the dimensions multi-culturalism and diversification strategy: “Separation” – keep acquired firm’s culture and remain separate; “Assimilation” – acquired firm’s adopting both culture and strategy; “Integration” – acquired firm adjusts to strategy, but keep its existing culture; “Deculturation” – acquired firm remain complete autonomy (Angwin & Meadows, 2015, p. 236; Ellis & Lamont, 2004, p. 84). Lastly, the framework presented by Marks and Mirvis is more alike the first authors, however they take both parties into consideration with their one axis of need for change in acquiring firm and the other as need for change of acquired firm: “Adoption” – acquired firm integrate with the acquiring; “Preservation” – no integration takes place; “Transformation” – both companies acclimatize to respective party and configure new strategies; “Reverse Takeover” – acquired company steer consolidation; “Best of both” – unite cultures and combines best practices (Marks & Mirvis, 2001, p. 85-86; Angwin & Meadows, 2015, p. 236; Ellis & Lamont, 2004, p. 84). As can be distinguished, each framework focuses on slightly different aspects. An elaboration of each framework is developed in the theoretical framework.

In order to extend the discourse of integration approaches above, they are catalysts to transfer capabilities and knowledge amid the parent company and acquired firm, which is regarded as one desired outcome of acquisitions to foster competitive advantages (Jemison & Sitkin, 1986, p. 159; Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991, p. 2; Schweiger & Goulet, 2000, p. 77). As known, a “one-size-fit-all” strategy is idealistic, however not realistic, since all acquisitions are embedded with unique characteristics simply through their nature (Schweiger & Goulet, 2000, p. 87). One reason for desired capability transfer between acquiring company and target company can be understood from Haspeslagh and Jemison’s framework. In order for long-term value to occur, an integration of the two firm’s resources and knowledge need to create a superior combination of capabilities (Angwin & Meadows, 2015, p. 236). Such combination is explained through their concept of strategic interdependency, wherein Angwin and Meadows (2015, p. 236) ascribe that dimension conclusively as a strategic fit of companies. Basically, to which degree the companies share structures, systems and resources. Researchers have unanimously called for a fruitful atmosphere wherein exchange of capabilities can assimilate (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991, p. 2; Caiazza & Volpe, 2015, p. 212; Björkman, Stahl & Vaara, 2007, p. 20).

1.2 Importance of learning
Elaborating on capabilities, we deepen the notion through dynamic capabilities. Thus, it is defined as follows: “The firm’s ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments” (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 340). However, the authors simultaneously denote an embedded complexity in such definition, since it has a prerequisite of fast-moving environment to count as capability, thus suggest following correction: “A dynamic capability is a learned and stable pattern of collective activity through which the organization systematically generates and modifies its operating routines in pursuit of improved effectiveness” (Zollo
The reason dynamic capabilities are important is because they moderate performance in the context of M&A according to findings from Trichterborn, Knyphausen-Aufsess and Schweizer (2016, p. 770). As seen above, positive performance amongst acquisitions is a rarity, thus variables that can help enhance performance are of interest. Conversely, different views on dynamic capabilities prevail in research. The discourse accelerated significantly with the publication from Teece, Pisano and Shuen (1997) and has since continued. There is yet no admitted consensus concerning the phenomenon, although different proposals have been discussed; ranging from definition to its core nature (Easterby-Smith, Lyles & Peteraf, 2009, p. 2; Barreto, 2009, p. 257). Moreover, one question remains relevant: How do firms build and improve their dynamic capabilities? For this thesis, we will follow Zollo and Winter’s (2002, p. 349) identification of “deliberate learning” as the underlying mechanism that contributes in developing dynamic capabilities (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 349; Kale & Singh, 2007, p. 994; Trichterborn et al., 2016, p. 771; Chatterjee, 2009, p. 145; Easterby-Smith et al., 2009, p. 3; Barreto, 2009, p. 257).

Deliberate learning is an in-depth, further evolved and thus more methodical activity than semiautomatic learning (Heimeriks, Schijven & Gates, 2012, p. 704). The discourse on deliberate learning is academically young regarding mergers and acquisitions, since previous traditional perspective assumed learning happened by accumulation of experience (Heimeriks et al., 2012, p. 704). One problem preceding this discourse is as Ranft (2006, p. 54) explains: “Resources that are based on tacit, embedded knowledge are the most fragile and difficult to transfer”. Accordingly, companies involved in post-merger integration consciously need to transfer named knowledge in such delicate stage in the process. In their strive to solve this problem, companies seek for the human resources’ experiences to make sense, in order to retain embedded knowledge within the company. Especially four traits distinguish deliberate learning, adding several mechanics to facilitate transmissibility, according to prominent researchers (Kale & Singh, 2007, p. 994; Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 349). First, it requires “articulation” of knowledge, which implies possessors of personal know-how to express that in words – spoken or written (Kale & Singh, 2007, p. 984). Second, it requires “codification” of that knowledge, which denotes transmission of articulated words to executable documents, i.e. manuals or checklists (Kale & Singh, 2007, p. 984). Third, there is “sharing” of knowledge, as would be interpersonal exchange of articulated or coded knowledge (Kale & Singh, 2007, p. 984). Lastly, “institutionalizing” of such knowledge plays decisive part, since it ensures knowledge deployment (Kale & Singh, 2007, p. 984).

Ranft (2006, p. 53) emphasizes tacit knowledge as knowledge that is seized through experience, with the transmissibility as most challenging aspect. Further examples are given that codified knowledge is communicable through formal language, while accumulation of skills and tacit knowledge is not that easy in the post-integration phase. Therefore, firms with a higher degree of tacit knowledge will be harder to integrate (Cloodt, Hagedoon & Van Kranenburg, 2006, p. 650). Nonetheless, there is an interesting stream of thought, which has evolved recently, in that companies from emerging markets tend to exploit acquisitions with the purpose of extracting tacit knowledge from developed countries inhabited with desirable capabilities (Hitt, Dacin, Levitas, Arregle & Borza, 2000, p. 462; Gubbi, Aulakh, Sarkar & Chittoor, 2010, p. 402; Dobbs & Gupta, 2009; Kale, Singh & Raman, 2009). Since companies from less developed countries not reside certain knowledge and capabilities important for competitiveness (especially in domestic markets), they seek to extend present organizational knowledge through...
acquiring knowledge resided in developed companies’ repertoire (Hitt et al., 2000, p. 462; Gubbi et al., 2010, 402). Hence, a humble approach with intent to learn is central incentive of acquiring a domestic firm. Also, with different incentives follows different strategy. Dobbs and Gupta (2009) together with Kale et al. (2009) suggest companies – with the likes of Tata group for instance – try to partner with their counterpart in greater extent than take-overs. In essence, the strategy is to hold acquired firm autonomous, on arm’s lengths. Instead, try to extract tacit knowledge from current staff under friendly forms and thus not replace top management in order to force acquiring firm’s entire structure upon the acquired (Dobbs & Gupta, 2009; Kale et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, experience should not be regarded as universal panacea, literature tells us (Barkema & Shijven, 2008, p. 608). Mishandling of experience can instead result in worse performance, regarding post-acquisition performance. Disentangled cause-affect-relationships wrongly applied on subsequent integration phase can confuse the interpretation of events, without adequate procedure for settlement (Lauser, 2010, p. 11). In strive for problematizing prior experience, there are several articles in which different interrelationships are reviewed. For instance, Galavotti, Cerrato and Depperu (2017, p. 128) found in their study that managers’ confidence level increases, correlatively, as experience is gained. Thus, such fact implies managers may grow “overconfident” to undertake riskier and riskier acquisition. For example, shift focus from domestic market to cross-border with biased assumptions that same complexities exist (Galavotti et al., 2017, p. 129). Another example is a study by Al-Laham, Schweizer and Amburgey (2010, p. 34) that found inexperienced acquirers to generalize their limited knowledge from previous deals, to subsequent ones, though they were of different nature to each other. Interestingly for our case regarding serial acquirers, performance varies substantially (Laamanen & Keil, 2008, p. 670). Serial acquirers display inconsistent performance, ranging from positive performance in financial aspects to negative performance, with prior experience as variable (Henningsson, 2015, p. 122). However, even though final performance was measured negative, underlying mechanism such as learning and organizational capability development showed to affect positively of experience, since development of routines and overall learning was enhanced (Laamanen & Keil, 2008, p. 670). Homogeneousness (i.e. firms’ resemblance) tends to be an important variable as mediator for successful integration. For example, Meschi and Metais (2006, p. 431) found a significant relationship between acquirers with substantial experience and performance of subsequent acquisition – in case the deals were homogenous. As for Al-Laham et al. (2010), complexity seems to be highly present and decisive in outcome for integration efforts. Hence, improved skills in interpretation of experience are clearly needed.

1.3 Identification of research gaps
The role of prior experience for subsequent M&As performance is yet to be fully comprehended. According to Haleblian et al. (2006, p. 357), there is an unexplored area in how companies acclimatize their acquisition strategy based on reflection of previous experience. Thus, the authors conclude their paper by stating firms need to further develop activities by which absorbs learning outcomes and transfer these to subsequent acquisitions (Haleblian et al., 2006, p. 357). Furthermore, the way in which prior knowledge and experience furnish post-M&A integration process is according to Ai and Tan (2017, p. 648) still incomplete. As can be depict from our problematization, different authors provide quantitative correlations between variables such as experience and propensity to engage in future acquisitions (Haleblian & Finkelstein, 1999, p. 50).
However, the question remains how post-merger integration is affected. A meta-study conducted by Stahl et al. (2013, p. 337), where they try to highlight unresolved areas in M&A literature, they particularly urge future research to dig deeper under which conditions different activities can facilitate learning through experience. Dubious understanding is now prevailing in regards of what is known, but we can deduce – from mentioned authors – future research needs to fill these gaps in order to extend current literature.

Learning has long been assumed to occur automatically, simply by undertaking a varied set of activities. Presumably, undertaking such activities would have fostered learning from that experience. Notwithstanding, this notion of thought should be regarded as dated (Barkema & Shijsven, 2008, p. 612; Stahl et al., 2013, p. 337). Elaborately, in order to actually advance one’s capability (i.e. deliberate learning actions), reserved time for reflection, discussions, needs to be organizationally installed for learning to take place. As mentioned researchers argue, the ad hoc-view of learning-by-doing may not be applicable for modern, fast-changing environments where time is regarded as luxury goods. Future studies need to take into consideration that more deliberate actions need to be established (Barkema & Shijsven, 2008, p. 612). Moreover, in the most encompassing meta-article, given the numbers of prominent researchers all named as authors, a call for further investigation about learning is laid out (Stahl et al., 2013, p. 338). Learning, perfunctory looked upon as something obvious, may be more complex than just piling up experience and learn from it; learning has to be taken serious through action that systematically handles the process to build a library of knowledge and increase core competency. Conclusively, this argumentation gets support from Ferreira, Santos, Almeida and Reis (2014, p. 2556), who in their article state a key area that remains underresearched is the learning effects from consequences of acquisitions, thus, what firms can learn from their accumulated experience.

Abovementioned argumentation regarding learning leads to the reflection what deliberate actions for learning from previous experience are. A clear research gap is provided by Very and Schwiger (2001, p. 29) where they state: “[...] research should aim at explaining how experience from a deal is appropriately accumulated, utilized and subsequently institutionalized”. A call for more nuanced research regarding deliberate learning actions, such as articulation, codification and institutionalization is made by Zollo and Winter (2002, p. 349). The authors also posit questions for future research how these activities are tied to future performance (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 350). Same question, whether deliberate learning affects future performance, is also supported and posited by Zollo and Singh (2004, p. 1254). However, they plea future studies to further understand this phenomena from different contexts, since their article studied the bank sector. Moreover, Marks and Mirvis (2011, p. 166) propose several research questions, with regards to their prior study of uncovered areas. In which one is more outstanding – they suggest future studies to see how firms effectively transfer learning from different phases in the M&A process in order to create competencies and thus better perform subsequent acquisitions (Marks & Mirvis, 2011, p. 166). Elaborately, for example, how does one firm effectively learn from their post-merger integration phase and thus perform subsequent integration better.
1.4 Research questions and purpose

RQ1:  
How can learnings be captured from previous experience in integration after cross-border acquisition?

RQ2:  
How can learnings from previous experience of cross-border acquisition integration be utilized in subsequent deals?

Purpose
Our purpose is to understand how learnings are drawn from previous experiences of cross-border acquisition integration, to later be utilized for integration of subsequent acquisitions. Elaborately, we intend to empirically study how learnings from previous endeavors are captured and built upon. Thus, there are two research questions given the sequence: learnings are first captured, then utilized. The study aims to extend current body of literature and deepening the understanding on deliberate learning through case study aspects. Consequently, the purpose is the result of abovementioned introduction, problematization and knowledge gap.

1.5 Selected case
In order to answer the research questions and purpose mentioned above, our study will be conducted using qualitative research design. The study adopts a case study research strategy, in which data is collected primarily through semi-structured interview, with complementary secondary data materialized as internal documents and annual reports. Furthermore, we have one company serving as case for this study. The company operates in the international off-shore business, having done numerous global acquisitions and is currently in the process of acquiring multiple international companies. Due to the severity of our anonymity contract with concerned company, we cannot disclose names, internal material or details which could potentially identify individuals or the organization and thus cause harm. The methodology and practical method is further explained in respective section below, in which further argumentation in relation to our choices are outlaid and reviewed for.

1.6 Delimitations
We have chosen to delimit our study in certain aspects. Our thesis will only study one company case, instead of multiple cases. Our case is a Scandinavian company, yet with international customers and global presence. Further, we delimit ourselves to the post-merger integration phase of a M&A. Lastly, our thesis delimits its focus point to learning aspects in the post-merger phase.

1.7 Theoretical point of departure
We have chosen to proceed with the knowledge-based view of a firm as our point of departure for our thesis. In following theoretical framework, preferred perspective helps us interpret theories and compare theories with alternative aspects. Many studies deploy resource-based view of the firm when researching topics in business context; this gives us an alternative complement to analyze theories posited from other perspectives. The cardinal assumption of knowledge-based view is that knowledge constitutes as key
resource for a firm (Grant, 1997, p. 451). In essence, a firm consists of bundles with capabilities and knowledge, resided in the individuals who institute the company (Reus, 2012, p. 71). Hence, the specific knowledge – i.e. tacit knowledge or explicit knowledge – embedded within a firm together with its ability to transfer it could be regarded as determinant of a firm’s competitive advantage (Reus, 2012, p. 72). Transferability of knowledge is dependent on its nature; as discussed above, the critical dichotomy of knowledge distinguishes explicit knowledge from tacit knowledge (Grant, 1997, p. 451). To which degree both types of knowledge is transferred within its context is further dependent on underlying mechanism in the company (Kogut & Zander, 1992, p. 385). According to Reus (2012, p. 74), the knowledge itself is not self-sufficient, thus knowledge resided in individuals is easily evanescent given the risk of employee turnover. Therefore, knowledge itself cannot be accounted to constitute competitive advantage, instead, a firm’s underlying procedures to extract – foremost tacit knowledge – these capabilities from individuals and transform it into organizational capabilities is what should be regarded competitive advantage.

In the context of M&A, knowledge resided in respective company needs to be identified, valuated and institutionalized. Especially looked upon from a post-integration perspective, researchers mention two prominent capabilities: knowledge creation and knowledge integration (Weber, Rachman-Moore & Tarba, 2011, p. 77). Firstly, creation of new, homogenous capabilities following a new organizational structure is identified to facilitate the integration of newly merged companies (Weber et al., 2011, p. 77). Secondly, integration of knowledge involves deployment and transferability of shared resources. Integration may emerge through either simple transfer amid the firms, or educationally through staff training (Weber et al., 2011, p. 78). In essence, as both Reus (2012, p. 74) and Weber et al. (2011, p. 78) posit, underlying mechanisms are important targets of research, as these determines whether vital knowledge is destroyed or enhanced in current organizational setting but particularly follow an acquisition.
2. Methodology

In following chapter, we describe our methodological considerations and argue for our choices in accordance with the study. The purpose is to justify our interpretations and display how our choices might have consequences on the gathered, analyzed and presented data.

2.1 Research paradigm

A paradigm can generally be explained as individual’s way of defining reality, by which is constructed on assumptions of ontology, epistemology and methodology (Morgan, 1980, p. 2; Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011, p. 255). The paradigmatic choice further guide researchers to organize a framework for theory and methodical approach (Neuman, 2011, p. 94). There are four different paradigms in which research can have its point of departure, that is: Radical humanist, Radical structuralist, Interpretive and Functionalism (Burell & Morgan, 1979, p. 22; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012, p. 141; Morgan, 1980, p. 4). We will briefly highlight the key assumptions of each paradigm herein, in order to provide grasping understanding (for in-depth reading, see Burell & Morgan, 1979 and Clegg, Hardy, Lawrence & Nord, 2006). The radical humanist paradigm emphasizes how reality is a subjectively created social arrangement, with reality perceived through human interaction (Morgan, 1980, p. 4). However, the paradigm regards the organization as imprisonment for individuals’ consciousness, which calls for exemption from these structures through radical means to fulfill complete intellectual freedom (Burell & Morgan, 1979, p. 32). On the other side of the radical spectrum is radical structuralism. This paradigm regards the reality as independent individual perception, instead, reality is autonomously self-sufficient and objective (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 143). Radicalism is advocated to devour entwined structures, modeled in forms of systematic domination (i.e. organizations) and deprivation (Burell & Morgan, 1979, p. 34; Morgan, 1980, p. 4). The functionalist paradigm seeks so generate objective, rational explanations to social arrangements (Burell & Morgan, 1979, p. 26). Yet, social arrangements are seen as contextual-bound, but research strives to explain social reality through scientific models, with the researcher disconnected from the study object (Morgan, 1980, p. 5). Lastly, the interpretive paradigm takes stance in subjectivism in the sense of understanding reality through social constructions – not as an interdependent object (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 142). The attempts are focused to portray and understand organizations every-day-activities, rather than radically change status quo (Burell & Morgan, 1979, p. 28; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 143).

We have chosen to position our study within the interpretative paradigm (Morgan, 1980, p. 5; Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011, p. 255; Welch, Piekkari, Eriikka & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2011, p. 745; Deetz, 1996, p. 193). Our aim for this study is to understand how learnings are drawn from previous experience of cross-border acquisition integration. Hence, in order to understand the phenomena, we implicitly interpret the objective’s subjective interpretations of an acquisition, thus the inherent resided experience that cannot be explained objectively. The respondents’ experience of acquisitions is essential in enabling understanding to transpire. From our point of view, personal experience is no objective case for inspection, in which the self is completely disconnected from biasing perceived reality. Consequently, our study has no intention to disentangle our respondent’s experiences from its contextual nature to extract objective knowledge. Instead, we acknowledge contextual aspects to take them into consideration as factors affecting our data analysis.
We find solid support for our choice of paradigm to research within. Scotland (2012, p. 12) posits that meaning in the social reality is differently constructed by a several of individuals and their interactions, but also with reality as co-creator in the equation. He continues by stating the researchers’ role is not to describe the reality as observers, instead, understanding is co-created between researchers and respondents (Scotland, 2012, p. 13). In addition, Welch et al. (2011, p. 745) emphasize the interpretative paradigm’s pursuit for context-bound, subjective orientation in search of relative meaning. Also, Welch et al. (2011, p. 745) discuss the weight of general theory-building from the particular empirical material, with no focus to yield causal relations between variables, but take a holistic perspective to generate overarching contributions. Morgan (1980, p. 5) adds to the argumentation above that sense-making, both of historical events and future, is a focal role for researchers to shoulder. Moreover, Deetz (1996, p. 193) argues for interpretative research to foremost aim alternative realities, with the studied context as peculiar – not the outside reality. Saunders et al. (2012, p. 143) state that interpretative paradigm fit properly with intentions to understand the organization’s inhabited characteristics in every-day activities, which in turn leave gaps to look further into and understand. The overarching argument poses in form of divergence from objective, rational experiences into subjective perceptions, where the functionalists for instance seek objectivity, which we deem as inappropriate (Clegg et al., 2006, p. 416). Conclusively, we believe in alignment with above-mentioned arguing that the interpretative paradigm is adequate.

2.2 Ontological assumption
Ontology can be defined to be “concerned with nature of reality” (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 130). Most commonly is a dichotomy presented in description of ontology, that is, objectivism and subjectivism or realism and relativism (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 32; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 130; Clegg et al., 2006, p. 420; Deetz, 1996, p. 193). The notions differ between authors, but represent same view upon reality (henceforth, we will refer to objectivism/realism as objectivism and subjectivism/relativism as subjectivism). Notably, this dichotomy is a result of stripping down the philosophical discourse to its core. Other varieties are present in the literature, albeit the dogma above generalizes the philosophical perspectives (Blaike, 2012, p. 81). In line with the paradigmatic argumentation, ontology is together with epistemology and methodology what establishes a paradigm. Objectivism can be described as the realm in which social entities – i.e. individuals – are redundant in creation of what philosophy considers reality (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 130). The degree to which reality exists without individual participation vary, according to Bryman & Bell (2012, p. 32). But the argumentation would classify an organization as independent entity, realized without people working in it. Elaborating on the example of an organization, objectivists name structure and hierarchy as the heart of any firm in which different individuals position themselves within to fulfill an organizational mission (Bryman & Bell, 2012, p. 32). Subjectivism instead ascribes the reality the way in which social actors interact, therefore challenging the assumption that an organization could be self-reliant without social processes (Bryman & Bell, 2012, p. 33; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 132). An inference of this ontology thus proposes different realities in every organization. With the argumentation social actors’ interplay cause a reality perceived only by themselves but would be argued to be another if a detached individual would have it portrayed (Rosenberg, 2012, p. 37).
In strong relationship with our paradigm, we have chosen to proceed with subjectivism as ontology for this study. Our study aims to understand the subjective peculiarities that experience represents, which take context and social interaction into consideration to project reality. More specifically, we seek to understand how experience of post-merger integration related activities could subsequently be utilized in forthcoming acquisitions. The experience is not disentangled from the respondent’s own perception of experience tied to acquisitions, thus the context is vital to project certain notions upon. Furthermore, subjectivism corresponds with our view that an organization simply is a castle in the air without people as foundation. Conclusively, we as researchers believe our interaction with the object of research is biased by our preconceptions and ontological certainty.

Our described desire best corresponds with subjectivism before objectivism, which we also find backing from in the literature. To further our example – and studied environment – through an organization, Neuman (2011, p. 103) advocates for subjectivism with regards to reality’s construction through purposeful interaction; the reality within an organization postulates an alternative reality on the premises of certain people integrating. We are aware of the obstacles of delineating our studied environment as an objective reality in which people from outside would define the surrounding in alignment with the individuals actually working within the company. Furthermore, our engagement with the respondents renders in simultaneous co-creation of the reality, since our projections of their actuality gets molded by their interpretations (Scotland, 2012, p. 12). In doing so, our participation biases an objective description of the so-called reality according to objectivism. Therefore, our research purpose would not cohere with objectivism. Lastly, both Saunders et al. (2012, p. 132) and Bryman and Bell (2012, p. 32) stress the importance of process-view when researching organizations, by which self-explains reality as process-driven and continuous. As researchers, we cannot expect to get a biopsy of one defined, objective reality – but instead see it as constantly shaping.

2.3 Epistemological assumption
Mostly, in conventional business method literature, a simplified dualism is presented when dissecting scientific philosophy. In-depth reviews are available (e.g. Burrell & Morgan, 1979 and Clegg, Hardy, Lawrence & Nord, 2006) to trace every branch of philosophical perspective. However, we continue to present a dichotomy for the sake of simplicity and succinct in our methodological reasoning. Thus, in the line of business research, most commonly postulated epistemological dualism regards positivism and interpretivism (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 133; Bryman & Bell, 2012, p. 27; Neuman, 2011, p. 95; Punch, 2014, p. 17; Myers, 2013, p. 37; Scotland, 2012, p. 11). First, epistemology interests in the nature of knowledge, and how it is produced (Neuman, 2011, p. 93; Scotland, 2012, p. 1). Positivism can be defined as “the natural science in social science” (Myers, 2013, p. 38). In elaboration, positivism places emphasis upon testing theory through the development of hypotheses in order to identify causal laws (Neuman, 2011, p. 95). The research is exempted from values by which can risk biasing measurement of the studied phenomenon. Positivistic studies arise from theoretical reasoning to later develop hypotheses to test suggestions embedded in theory (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 134). Interpretivism, contrasting positivism, again focuses on understanding social behavioral phenomenon instead of explaining them (Bryman & Bell, 2012, p. 29). Saunders et al. (2012, p. 137) argue that interpretivism strives to include embedded complexities in connection to the world, contrary to positivism that seeks cause-effect relationships and thus tend to neglect complexity whilst distilling phenomena to measurable variables.
Neuman (2011, p. 106) argues that good evidence within interpretive epistemology take context, experience and interaction into consideration.

Our choice, following the same line of argument from paradigm, is to advance with an interpretative epistemology. Myers (2013, p. 41) proclaims that positivism count experience as objective, dethatched and independent from social interaction. We believe our purpose to understand what role experience has requires personal knowledge to be placed within the context of origin. Not broadly regarded as general experience, since M&A experience differ greatly from acquisition to acquisition. Neuman (2011, p. 102) argues that meaning of knowledge can only be applicable if contextual variables are calculated for, with capturing of the individual's’ perception and organizational role imperative. Saunders et al. (2012, p. 137) describe the importance of interpretation through a metaphor of theater play: In any play, the actors are presumed to act upon a director’s instructions, or improvisation, which aligns a greater story. However, as spectators to the play, we are aware that personal traits may shine through or affect how the role is interpreted. Hence, Saunders et al. (2012, p. 137) imply that individuals in organizations “play an act” based upon social constructions applied in that context. We as researchers therefore need to bear in mind that contextual layers may affect how the outcome is shaped. Lastly, Bryman and Bell (2012, p. 28) argue that interpretivism is in line with subjectivism and the interpretative paradigm, which therefore created alignment in conducting research. We believe our choices establish a firm underpinning for our study to derive from given above-mentioned argumentation.

2.4 Research approach
Conducting research entails generation of theory from which conclusions are drawn (Adams, Khan, Raeside & White, 2007, p. 29). Most common are two kinds of reasoning, that is, inductive or deductive. Saunders et al. (2012, p. 143) elaborate deductive reasoning as when conclusions are drawn from tests of hypotheses. In addition, Neuman (2011, p. 68) describes deduction to start in the abstract literature to progressively refine it and create firmly testable hypotheses. Essentially, deduction owes it origin to natural science in which causal laws, regarded as “universal”, are derived from the theory and tested (Adams et al., 2007, p. 29). If these hypotheses turn out to be falsified, the theory then needs to be modified (Adams et al., 2007, p. 30). Inductive reasoning begins with an observation of any phenomenon in the real world, for theory to sequentially be developed and generalized (Neuman, 2011, p. 70). Herein, the focus shifts to generate universal theory upon a limited number of observations, since such observations usually disclose patterns to the extent of which general theory can be drawn upon (Adams et al., 2007, p. 29).

We have adopted the inductive approach of reasoning. One of the arguments for that is because our research topic evolved through an observation, both empirical and theoretical. One of the authors wrote his bachelor’s thesis on corporate culture in the post-merger integration phase, in which the problems of integration got revealed through interviews. Additionally, whilst reading the course “Project Management D”, we were introduced to an article by Bakker (2010, p. 472) in which the author postulates the problem of knowledge retention in temporary organizations. We later came to develop our research topic for this master’s thesis through those observations. Hence, we believe in line with Neuman (2011, p. 70) and Saunders et al. (2012, p. 144) that we inductively reasoned our research topic as we began vaguely from observations and reading to later
elaborate precise questions and theoretical framework. Also, as Punch (2014, p. 2) supports, our study aims theory generation before theory verification.

2.5 Research design and nature of the design
Following our line of argumentation from paradigm to research approach, our qualitative research design is unison underpinned and logically reasoned. In accordance with Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 20) outlining of qualitative research, our study tries to understand how learning are drawn from experience and thus seek meaning through interpretation. Hence, our study does neither try to explain any causal relationships nor provide one panacea for universal experience utilization. Saunders et al. (2012, p. 161) argue for the discrepancy between qualitative and quantitative research lies in the use of numeric or non-numeric data, that is, simply put, words against numbers. However, that dichotomy is not that distilled, for qualitative research may request numeric data as complementary (Gorard, 2013, p. 96). We believe that qualitative design coheres most suitably with our philosophical underpinning, with quantitative research as fundamentally mismatched to our entire research setting and objective. Neuman (2011, p. 175) believes that qualitative research scrutinizes “soft” data – observations and recordings – so thoroughly it should be regarded and ascribed the magnitude of typical numerical data. Richards and Morse (2007, p. 30) argue that if the purpose is to understand complexity embedded in multi-contextual situations in which the research takes place, qualitative research is appropriately prioritized before quantitative research. The authors continue to state that deeply rooted personal traits that could affect the study needs to be reviewed for, which qualitative approach account for given its philosophical foundation (Richard & Morse, 2007, p. 31). Additional to this, Maxwell (2013, p. 29) states that propensity for qualitative approach whispers of a process view of the world, in which people and social situations are central. We believe these arguments add to the already argued choice of ours.

Concerning the nature of our research design, our study adopts an exploratory research design. According to Adams et al. (2007, p. 20), exploratory research design is set out to understand a phenomenon of which is yet relatively unknown. The authors continue to state that exploratory design serves as foundation, upon which descriptive and explanatory design further elaborates through describing the phenomenon and explain relationships (Adams et al., 2007, p. 20). However, descriptive design seeks no intention to understand the actual events to any further degree; explanatory design requires certain data collection methods to explain in relationships through causality and correlation (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2010, p. 56). Neither of these mentioned designs correspond with our case of research, instead, exploratory research is used when the subject is yet to be explored due to its adolescent nature. With broader intentions to explain the phenomenon to an extent which could be regarded as premature, which better adheres to our study (Neuman, 2011, p. 38). Furthermore, Saunders et al. (2012, p. 377) add to the argumentation by stating that exploratory design coheres with inductive approach and qualitative interviews, seeking in-depth insights and understanding of the phenomenon and the studied individuals. To some extent, our chosen research design conforms with our methodological assumptions, in that sense of understanding precedes explanation. By perceiving the reality as contextual, we would have no credibility as of to try explaining certain events by means of inadequate data for that kind of study. We therefore believe our study’s research questions and purpose is best answered through our chosen nature of research design.
2.6 Preunderstanding
A presupposition of the general subject of business research is inevitable. We as researchers have been studying business economics for five years, with other courses additional to that. Therefore, we head into this study with certain pre-understanding. The argumentation of pre-understanding, however, does not undermine the value of background as foundation for interpretation (Gadamer, 2006, p. 45). Basically, without any presuppositions before encountering new knowledge, or new situations, we would not be able to fully comprehend nor categorize that experience (Gadamer, 2006, p. 46). The analysis would suffer severely if so was the case, argue Nyström and Dahlberg (2001, p. 340), thus the researchers would not be able to recognize important patterns disclosed by the respondents in parity to its context. In essence, researchers adopting an interpretative epistemology should cherish the prevalence of ensconced knowledge, thus the analysis contributes through more thoughtful and wide-ranging dimensions (Nyström & Dahlberg, 2001, p. 341). Moreover, engaging in research within an interpretative paradigm, in which reality is relative, we as researchers cannot ascribe phenomenon as “given” in the same sense as realism does, Gadamer (2006, p. 46) argues. Presupposition deeds understanding in that way, for every encountered situation requires our consciousness to cross-reference focal activity with previous experiences in order to sort and relate the activity (Gadamer, 2006, p. 47).

Our pre-understanding mostly comprehends mergers and acquisitions. Beside our initial understanding of business administrations in general, which has been taught to us through lecturers, the presupposition worthy to highlight is one of the author’s bachelor’s thesis. With focus on both M&As and corporate culture, the thesis had ten executives whom all had great amount of experience of conducting M&As. Those interviews gave a practical understanding complementary to the theoretical comprehension. What goes for organizational learning, neither of the authors have any pre-understanding that could bias the interpretation of our respondents’ utterances. However, we believe that through our practical and theoretical understanding of M&As, and our theoretical understanding of learning, we will have no problems to interpret the data in a proper, professional and scientific manner. Nonetheless, our most pre-understanding derives through the theoretical impregnation we have been exposed to. It is through our reading and development of theoretical framework – seen further down – that has provided us with rudimentary knowledge.

2.7 Literature reflection
The value of literature reflection lies within the positioning of the focal study in relation to current literature (Quinlan, 2011, p. 165). The purpose for critical reflection is foremost that “knowledge has to accumulate […] If no one takes notice of previous work the wheel keeps getting re-invented” (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls and Ormston, 2014, p. 51). Also, the purpose not only plays a role for literature generally, but a critical review composes the backbone of our study to create a solid foundation. With support from Saunders et al. (2012, p. 74), our theoretical framework has no intention to comprehend every aspect or theory presented in connection to our field of interest. Instead, we have consciously and carefully selected the most relevant literature, which corresponds to answer our research questions and purpose. Reading the literature on our topics gave us insights of what is missing, in terms of gap spotting. Sorting the literature, we were able to single out essential ideas together with flaws and undiscovered aspects (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 101).
The primary databases for our literature collection have been the library of Umeå University, Emerald Insights, Science Direct, Taylor & Francis Online, and Google Scholar. We have deliberately chosen to gather peer-reviewed articles as principal source, given its credibility. However, acclaimed books (e.g. Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991, most cited book in M&A literature according to Angwin and Meadows, 2015, p. 235) have also been included in both the theoretical framework and methodology. Furthermore, beside the database collection, most of the literature was collected through reference lists of already collected article. In that way, we established a clear understanding of which sources the essential articles used. In turn, our study could benefit from sharing the knowledge foundation our two main topics are underpinned with. We reserve ourselves from using “outdated” sources from before 1980’s with the argument of relevance – if the majority of our observed literature takes stance from certain articles that could be regarded stale, we believe its relevance is self-explanatory (Quinlan, 2011, p. 165).

The keywords used for our initial literature search were: Mergers and Acquisitions, M&A, Learning, Organizational learning, Deliberate learning, Experience in M&A, M&A experience, previous experience in M&A. From this initial search, we collected 98 scientific articles, which postulated the main foundation of our collected literature. After briefly reading through the articles, we decided to discard articles and add articles we found fruitful from reference lists. Additionally, we decided to add the most essential books in cross-border M&A and M&A in general terms. Also, the process of abandoning and add articles proceeded throughout the entire research process. Further, the methodology part together with practical method required a larger number of books, which were gathered in the library of Umeå University. Methodology books are frequently used in creation of the method chapter, which supports our choice of mostly relying on books before articles.
3. Theoretical framework
Following chapter reviews the theoretical framework for this study. First, we present perspectives on mergers and acquisitions. Then, we present perspectives on learning, with specific theories which underpins the study and stipulates a narrowed delineation of learning in the aspect of this study. Lastly, we present our theoretical tools based on our argumentation from the two perspectives.

3.1 Perspectives on Mergers & Acquisitions
The popularity to grow via mergers and acquisitions has increased substantially in organizations worldwide, especially last two decades (Budhwar et al., 2009, p. 89). Assumingly, popularity has surged past decade counting from 2009. On the contrary, as shown in introduction, the transaction costs score higher and higher each year. Yet, failure rate goes hand-in-hand with popularity; ranging from half of all deals in beginning of 1990’s to 50-80% in terms of financial performance – both return on investment and profit (Bach & Whitehill, 2008, p. 115; Lee, Kim & Park, 2015, p. 580). However, focus has shifted from hard factors, e.g. return or profit, to “softer” factors, e.g. stress or culture, since 1980 according to Lee et al. (2015, p. 580). This shift in focus could be traced back not to one single factor, instead, it should nudge researcher to see general trends solidify. Before elaborating on our focal issue, the post-M&A integration, there will be a further development on depicting different types and characteristics. After all, one needs to possess an initial understanding of the lifecycle of M&As, since each part could not be regarded as complete autonomous but intertwined to different degree.

Initially, the notion of M&A prevalence is itself two-fold: either a merger takes place, or an acquisition. Mergers connotes the procedure in which two companies are input, with normally one unified company outcomes as output (Chan-Olmsted, 1998, p. 35). An example is the merger between Daimler-Benz and Chrysler, two giants operating in car manufacturing, which engaged in a reputed merger to become DaimlerChrysler. Widely known, named merger ended in one of history’s most witnessed failure. Endless of research has investigated what went wrong, and what could have been done. However, consensus prevails around the concept of mismanagement in the post-merger integration prompt failure (Hollman, Carpes & Beuron, 2010, p. 433). Acquisition, on the other hand, occurs when one part – the acquirer – purchases the assets of another part – the target company – in trade for monetary funding or stocks in the acquiring company (Chan-Omlstede, 1998, p. 35). Notably, firms occasionally decide to consolidate, in which the procedure differs slightly from merging, that is, the procedure could be viewed as “friendlier” for both companies agree to establish a new organization equally divided in stocks (Chan-Olmstedt, 1998, p. 35).

Moreover, initial comprehension encompasses different types classifications in terms of industry, that is, transactions could be considered horizontal or vertical (Morresi & Pezzi, 2014, p. 2; Berk & DeMarzo, 2017, p. 997). Namely, horizontal M&As is when target company and acquirer operate in same line of industry, for example, Daimler-Benz and Chrysler. On the contrary, a vertical M&A is when the acquirer and target locates differently in the value chain. For example, a vertical transaction would be one car manufacturer to acquire a sub-contractor, in order for the parent company to control the value chain (Morresi & Pezzi, 2014, p. 7; Berk & DeMarzo, 2017, p. 997). Conclusively, companies seek to differentiate their strategic approach depending on desired outcome. Different motives usually lie as foundation for which approach is chosen and is therefore
important to take into consideration. Although our focus is on integration, motives and approach has implications to which degree integration may be needed and how integration will shape (Marks & Mirvis, 2011, p. 162). Next, we will highlight the essential motives for mergers in the research, in order to underline the importance of motives in connection to integration strategy.

3.1.1 Reasons for failure

A growing interest in research can be detected regarding failure rates and underlying reasons for these unwanted outcomes. However, different propositions have been given what causes deficiencies in M&A transactions. Generally, three major concepts of analysis are present as hovering notions: strategic issues (Stahl et al., 2013, p. 334), financial issues (Cartwright & Cooper, 1993, p. 58), and human related issues (Lodorfos & Boateng, 2006, p. 1406). Arguably, these three concepts entitle all aspects of sub-categories in which individual researchers focus their studies. Interestingly, the meta-study conducted by King et al. (2004, p. 195) showed a non-significant relationship of all their studied antecedents to M&A performance as variable. They further suggest unidentified variables plausibly moderate performance, which is yet to be discovered. Cartwright and Cooper (1993, p. 58) argue that when financial expectations preceding the focal settlement is not achieved, managers tend to turn toward financial aspects leading up to the deal; if the calculus was wrong or if the valuation was too high. Even though these decisions are irreversible, large amount of energy is put to try understanding what in the foregoing process prompt failure. Marks and Mirvis (2011, p. 162) instead suggest failure headlined as result of poor strategic intends, e.g. market power or potential synergies, root in top-executives’ self-interest – either through monetary compensation or even hubris. In the extension, these hollow intentions deduce no creation of value, since strategic approach is not properly aligned with overall business strategy. In line with above argumentation, Aktas, Bodt and Roll (2009, p. 556) tested the hypothesis regarding hubris-infected CEOs and found significant relationship between the variable and declining return from acquiring company, which support the argument of CEO’s personal-interest (or rather personal trait) affecting performance regarding acquisitions.

Continuing on potential reasons for failure, numerous researchers have recently shifted focus towards “soft” factors (Lodorfos & Boateng, 2006, p. 1403; Saunders, Altinay & Riordan, 2009, p. 1360; Teerikangas & Very, 2006, p. 31). Corporate culture is frequently researched and put forward as contributing factor for M&A failure according to Saunders et al. (2009, p. 1372). However, there are flaws in research concerning corporate culture, and to what degree it is responsible to prevent expected outcomes to be realized according to Teerikangas and Very (2006, p. 45). They posit identification of corporate culture as variable to performance to reduce complexities tied to M&A processes. The authors advice forthcoming research to regard the M&A process as habitant of various embedded dynamics affecting performance, and therefore need for clearer definition and measurements are necessary (Teerikangas & Very, 2006, p. 45). However, research judge culture as contributing factor for failure to achieving pre-set activities and goals, stating employees in respective company are not prepared for the rapid change of environment as consequence of merger (Lodorfos & Boateng, 2006, p. 1413). This statement is supported by Saunders et al. (2009, p. 1371) whereas they found cultural integration especially challenging for both parties, not only acquired firm. Effective communication and transparency throughout the entire process is particularly important aspects, in order to reduce uncertainties when merging with another set of individuals.
3.1.2 Reasons for success
To identify success factors in the M&A process could be the difference between bankruptcy and market leaders. Research proposes several potential antecedents for achieving predetermined objectives, which is for instance, communication channels (Ahmad, Tarba, Liu, Gleister & Cooper, 2016, p. 445; Reus & Lamont, 2009, p. 1312), integration teams (Tetenbaum, 1999, p. 22; Marks & Mirvis, 2011, p. 165) or synergy realization (Brock, 2005, p. 271). Initially, Ahmad et al. (2016, p. 445) emphasize the role of communication in negotiation phase between acquiring and acquired company. Their result, with focus on cross-border M&As, indicates transparent communication facilitates the calibration of expectations. Specifically, the authors underline negation phase as vital for communication, for outcomes derived in that stage will work as benchmark when examining how the focal M&A performed (Ahmad et al., 2016, p. 453). Returning to merger of Daimler-Benz and Chrysler, Hollman et al. (2010, p. 439) instead, single out communication in the after-match of the merger. In that specific merger, the authors suggest, communication broke down following turnover amongst employees, resulting in demoralized workforce (Hollman et al., 2010, p. 439). Ultimately, a clear strategy for communication was absent, which rendered too much uncertainty for both parties. The suggestions by previous authors receive support from Reus and Lemont’s (2009, p. 1371) study, in which they establish a nexus between communication’s moderation of overall performance in an M&A’s integration phase. Further, they underline this enforced communication requires key personnel to maintain in the company after deal announcement, thus their presence lower employee anxiety (Reus & Lemont, 2009, p. 1372).

One action commonly used by certain companies, and identified in the literature, is deployment of integration teams in M&A deals (Tetenbaum, 1999, p. 22; Marks & Mirvis, 2011, p. 165; Salama, Holland & Vinten, 2003, p. 313). In essence, an integration team is assembled with individuals stemming from each organization with the object to smoothen transition for respective organization in transforming into one unit (Marks & Mirvis, 2011, p. 163). When retrospectively researching three cases – i.e. Deutsche Bank/Bankers Trust, British Petroleum/Amoco and Volvo/Ford – of mergers, Salama et al. (2003, p. 316) found that every involved party had established an integration team, with a varied composition of people, to work on integration-related tasks. Similar for each case, top executives’ broke ground and got together to reduce uncertainty amongst employees, which showed commitment to inspire efforts all through the organization. In addition to these findings, Tetenbaum (1999, p. 29) suggests that integration teams need to receive full support from upper-management to succeed in their work. He states the learning curve is so steep, together with infrequency of M&A activity for most companies that companies cannot afford to neglect its magnitude, thus the necessity for full-time integration team (Tetenbaum, 1999, p. 28). On the contrary to above suggestion, companies need to carefully assemble integration teams according to Marks and Mirvis (2011, p. 163). They instead suggest integration teams are overrated, given managers usual incapacity of M&A processes, which deduce no superior performance. Conclusively, the management of integration teams need its deserved allocation of time, otherwise they are nothing but ineffectual. However, with effective composition and dedicated work, integration team may be one success factor.

Moving onto synergy realization, this is one delicate phenomenon to elicit. Almost as with the case for Santiago in Paolo Coelho’s The Alchemist, synergy is the eternal price in the eyesight’s horizon. These bespoken synergies, however, could for managers justify
themselves through euphemisms for budget restrain (Bohlin et al., 2000, p. 226). The general idea of synergy is the famous equation “1+1=3”, that is, total value is greater through combination of firms than is individual operation (Seth, Song & Pettit, 2000, p. 389). Notably, in M&A literature, the most widely accepted driver for acquisition activity is potential synergy realization, even though the understanding of synergies is vague (King et al., 2004, p. 188). However, Brock (2005, p. 271) gives examples such as: Production synergies, that is, capitalizing on economy of scale or transfer product lines to more efficient factories; Technological synergies, that is, combination of distribution channels or amalgamation of sales forces; Organizational synergies, that is, blending of personnel to enhance creativity or extract particular state-of-the-art knowledge. Again, synergies vary greatly in shape; these are only a few examples. However, if these synergies are realized they could result in advantages competitors do not hold. We reserve ourselves to synergy realizations, with support from King et al. (2004, p. 198), who conclude from their meta-analysis that acquisitions achieve no performance for an acquiring firm beyond M&A announcement, and together with Bohlin et al. (2000, p. 226) and Gomes et al. (2013, p. 23) with their suggestion managers refer explicitly to synergies, which simply means reducing costs.

3.1.3 Linking pre-merger phase with post-merger phase
Given the decision to delimit our thesis focusing on post-merger integration, greater emphasis will be placed for that section, than will pre-merger phase and its antecedents. Nonetheless, literature is aware of the interrelatedness between pre- and post-phase to the degree decisions taken in first stage, affects strategies and outcomes in the latter (Stahl et al., 2013, p. 335). Initially, the meta-analysis by Stahl et al. (2013, p. 334) stress the fact of shortage in literature connecting pre-merger with post-merger to a more complex degree than their interrelation and call for further investigations to research outcome with such variables as moderators. Starting with factors preceding an acquisition, researchers have identified two aspects particularly important for value creation to emerge, that is, strategic fit and organizational fit (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991, p. 13; Jemison & Sitkin, 1986a, p. 146; Jemison & Sitkin, 1986b; Stahl et al., 2013, p. 335; Bauer & Matzler, 2014, p. 271).

Strategic fit connotes to what degree target company, for instance, is related to parent company’s business strategy in regards of customers, market and industry (Jemison & Sitkin, 1986a, p. 146; Bauer & Matzler, 2014, p. 272). As Jemison and Sitkin (1986b) argue in their article, strategic fit usually works as purpose for the entire acquisition. Synergies, herein named as value creation potential, works as drivers to capture value and is determined of the two firms’ relatedness (Haspeslagh & Jemson, 1991, p. 60). According to Cartwright and Schoenberg (2006, p. 4) is strategic fit the single most agreed prerequisite for acquisition performance in the strategic literature. However, the authors reserve themselves with stating underperformance cannot simply be deducible from strategic fit – more variables moderate performance (Cartwright & Schoenberg, 2006, p. 4). Further, numerous researchers agree upon the fact that strategic assessment is highly quantifiable. Basing estimations on volume, price or cost rather than individuals, which in the extension makes evaluation of strategic fit more prone to generalizability across industries (Haspeslagh & Jemson, 1991, p. 60; Morresi & Pezzi, 2014, p. 122; Jemison & Sitkin, 1986b). Strategic fit should be conceived as necessary requirement for acquisitions, but never as a satisfactory condition, that is, because of needed supplement from organizational fit (Jemison & Sitkin, 1986a, p. 148).
Organization fit is defined by Jemison and Sitkin (1986a, p. 147) as a “match between administrative practices, cultural practices, and personnel characteristics of the target company”. This is argued to be more abstract in terms of precision for practitioners – especially experts – to evaluate and foremost to try generalizing from amidst companies (HASPESLAGH & JEMISON, 1991, p. 60). Also, organizational issues tend to appear further forwards in the M&A process, given its abstraction to interfere with the negotiation stage, companies have a propensity to scoots discussions of organizational fit to later deal with the issues (JEMISON & SITKIN, 1986b). Morresi and Pezzi (2014, p. 122) support this statement by proclaiming organizational fit is most detrimental in post-acquisition integration stage. Since such issues materialize when both firms enter day-to-day operations, putting employees of respective firms with each other. Dynamic is easier sparked when individuals do interact in person, not when only discussed in negotiations. Corporate culture and individual’s inhabited values usually vary from top executives’ perception of employees’ behavior (Morresi & Pezzi, 2014, p. 122).

Although strategic fit and organizational are most common named as justifiers for acquisitions, or at least springboard for decision-making, none has received confirmation to render in M&A performance (STAHLE et al., 2013, p. 335; King et al., 2004, p. 198; GOMES et al., 2013, p. 15). As discussed above, synergy creation is widely known to prompt acquisitions, where assessment of strategic and organization fit works as first indicator if synergies could be realized. However, GOMES et al. (2013, p. 15) mention literature is yet to find consistent relationship to between strategic fit as variable to label it determinant. Additionally, the authors state, when researchers have not been successful through strategic fit, the focus shifted towards organizational fit in hope to establish that variable as causal reaction for M&A performance – without success (GOMES et al., 2013, p. 30 and Stahl et al. (2013, p. 347) to regard the acquisitions as processes, instead of isolated projects, to enhance understanding about interrelationship. Albeit a process approach has been advised early on by JEMISON and SITKIN (1986a) and HASPESLAGH and JEMISON (1991), future development calls for research to step out of isolating each phase and take a holistic view of the entire M&A process (GOMES et al., 2013, p. 15). Finally, to conclude the linkage between named phases, researchers instead state variation in pre-merger phase – i.e. different dynamics in organizational fit and strategic fit – work as causes for which integration strategy build upon (GOMES et al., 2013, p. 16).

3.1.4 Post-M&A integration approaches

We gave a scant overview of three integration approaches in the beginning of this thesis. In order to deepen that overview, a further development of each approach will herein follow. Namely, the first approach is the framework by Nahavandi and Malekzadeh (1988), the second approach – which also is the most cited (ANGWIN & MEADOWS, 2015, p. 235) – is the framework constructed by HASPESLAGH and JEMISON (1991), and the third is Marks and Mirvis’s (2001) framework. The choice of above-mentioned approaches is in line with the recommendations from ANGWIN and MEADOWS (2015, p. 234) and ELLIS and LAMONT (2004, p. 81), both by which argue for the approaches’ focus upon a process-view of acquisitions. Also argued by GOMES et al. (2013, p. 15), researchers need to adopt a holistic point-of-view regarding acquisition activity instead of isolating each phase, which we therefore respond to by elaborating on named approaches. Moreover, we will
elaborate each framework individually in chronological order, to later be compared against each other to highlight important differences or even flaws. Every attempt to deal with integration render in varied outcome, albeit complete similarities may be apparent. Following that understanding, each framework has different focus points, and cannot comprehend every aspect of every variable.

Nahavandi and Malekzadeh’s (1988) framework is a further development from the work by Berry (1983) and place greater emphasis on cultural alignment, peoples’ interactive nature following such organizational change through the lens of culture. Indifferent from most frameworks, Nahavandi and Malekzadeh (1988, p. 83) include both acquirer and acquired firm’s perspective of acculturation, resulting ultimately in two different models, albeit with same approaches. For acquired firm, the dimensions are “Preservation of own culture” together with “Attractiveness of acquirer”, where the latter connotes to attractiveness in terms of acquirer’s culture (Nahavandi & Malekzadeh 1988, p. 83). For acquiring firm, the framework proceeds from the dimensions divided into strategic and cultural: either “Relatedness” through strategic perspective, or “Multiculturalism” (Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1988, p. 84). Moreover, common for both frameworks, the same four approaches are used independent by which perspective is looked through. First, “Integration approach” is deployed when employees value the own corporate culture, and wants to remain separated from parent company’s beliefs, values and to some extent strategy (Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1988, p. 83). However, the acquired company agrees to be integrated into parent company’s structure, since their relatedness is high and can thus nurture synergies. Second, “assimilation approach” implies acquired company aligns totally with parent company. Unlike any hostile enforcement, target company desires to abandon its own culture and structure to be devoured by its counterpart (Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1988, p. 83). Third, “separation” occurs when total autonomous prevails, no party interacts with the other in terms of system or culture but stay separate units. One prerequisite for separation is allowance from the parent company, and if so, there will only be financial connection (Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1988, p. 83). Lastly, the fourth approach is “deculturation”, which is most devious – the acquired company is unwilling to adopt parent company’s culture, or to preserve current culture. Notably, Ellis and Lamont (2004, p. 88) label this approach most unlikely to ensue, for such antecedent would have been eliminated in negotiation stage.

Marks and Mirvis (2001) present a framework suitably labeled as intermediate between above-mentioned approaches; it encompasses both strategically and cultural dimensions. Also, the authors take a process-view (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991) of the entire acquisition and see to pre-combination intentions and approaches. By doing so, they suggest a clearly communicated end-state guides buyers to plan and execute integration, rather than insecurity when that time arrives (Marks & Mirvis, 2001, p. 85). Initially, the typology includes both acquiring company and acquired company, with the dimensions “Degree of change in acquiring firm” and “Degree of change in acquired firm” (Marks & Mirvis, 2001, p. 85). There are five approaches to the framework, all by which includes strategic and cultural degree of change. First approach, absorption, means acquired firm align with parent company’s culture and strategy. Additionally, change of top management is not unusual to speed the process (Marks & Mirvis, 2001, p. 85). Second approach, preservation, is when acquired company retains current procedures – both cultural and strategically (Marks & Mirvis, 2001, p. 85). As suggested by the authors, synergies are instead retrieved through joint programs or employee exchange (2001, p. 85). Third approach, transformation, is also the most complex; it requires both companies
to abandon existing organizational routines and culture to jointly engage in creating a complete new organizational setting (Marks & Mirvis, 2001, p. 86). Also, they underline most resources are invested in such approach – both monetary and human. Fourth approach, reverse takeover, is instead the most exceptional approach of named ones. By undertaking such endorsement, the acquired firm dictates the procedure of integration rather than being led (Marks & Mirvis, 2001, p. 86). However, as will be review later down, the approach might turn out profitable. Last approach, best of both, implies both companies ideally adopt the same culture, but partially adopt organizational functions (Marks & Mirvis, 2001, p. 86). This ought to be a complex procedure, thus both firms are required to co-operate and prestige-less consolidate.

Third, and last framework is the one conceptualized by Haspeslagh and Jemison (1991, p. 145). As mentioned above, the authors’ book is the most frequently cited work in the realm of M&A literature. Initially, founding dimensions for their framework are “Need for strategic interdependence” and “Need for organizational autonomy”, which is merely strategic and does not comprehend organizational culture (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991, p. 144). Regarding strategic interdependence, this dimension is tightly connected to the strategic fit between merging companies, which extensively suggest how well resources will be shared and how value emerge (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991, p. 139; Angwin & Meadows, 2015, p. 236). Value, defined by Haspeslagh and Jemison (1991, p. 23), is either created or captured, that is, short-term value capture occurs through one-time events – usually through moving financial assets between shareholders – to secure potential value inhabited in acquired firm. Value creation, on the other hand, is the long-term utilization of companies’ capabilities – superior manufacturing, technology, patent – that generates competitive advantage, which leads to value creation when strategically deployed in the market (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991, p. 22). Organizational autonomy instead concerns to what extent organizational fit is present, that is, the compatibility of two merging firms’ organizational culture and routines (Angwin & Meadows, 2015, p. 236). Also, they state, securing autonomy as acquired firm, fewer conflicts may be derived from intervention in decision-making.

With these dimensions as founding pillars in the framework, Haspeslagh and Jemison (1991, p. 145) conceptualize four approaches, whereof one is negligible given its unlikelihood to transpire. Namely, the first approach, preservation, is characterized through distancing acquired firm from parent firm, since high need of autonomy and low need for interdependency is present. In essence, both companies do not engage in heavier integration process, but consolidate only in financial terms to keep decision-making and managerial procedures separate (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991, p. 146). Second approach, symbiosis, could be categorized as most complex approach; given the juxtapose of high degree of both dimensions, the target firm needs to slowly be amalgamating with parent firm, gradually adopting organizational traits and routines (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991, p. 149). Here, the focal matter is to nurture trust and co-operation amongst top management and employees to further integrate best-practice strategy gradually (Ellis & Lamont, 2004, p. 86). Third approach, absorption, full consolidation is normally imminent (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991, p. 147). The target firm is set to incrementally adopt organizational processes and corporate culture, to become one with parent company, given the ultimate aim is to distinguish the borders between both firms and instead work as one unit (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991, p. 147; Ellis & Lamont, 2004, p. 86). Lastly, the holding approach is rarely deployed. No intentions to integrate both firms are present, with the parent company working as holding company for the target company
Suggested by respective author, the approach is seldom found in their empirical data and should therefore be regarded as negligible, since neither company has intentions to integrate any aspect of the business, thus such deals are not struck in the first place (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991, p. 144; Elliot & Reus, 2004, p. 88).

In additions to the approaches named above, there is one stemming from emerging market multinational companies (EMNC) strategy of acquisition: Partnering (Kale et al., 2009; Dobbs & Gupta, 2009; Kumar, 2009, p. 1). In essence, partnering approach to acquisitions tell another narrative of merging; instead of acquiring one company, EMNCs regard it as partnering with another firm (Dobbs & Gupta, 2009). Almost comparative with Marks and Mirvis’s (2001, p. 85) definition of reverse takeover, EMNCs adopt a hand-off strategy to instead learn about, for example, acquired firm’s technological superiority, which is because supplementary traits are common drivers for EMNCs to acquire according to Kumar (2009, p. 4). Hence, the mindset is to primarily extract absent knowledge in the acquiring firm through “partnership” and leave the target company autonomous (Kale et al., 2009). By doing so, target firm experience no change in organizational procedure or employee turnover, but instead seek to share attractive capabilities in higher extent than fully integrate. Kale et al. (2009) emphasize “sharing” as key component in partnering approach, and in the extension employ best-practice attitude together with target company, simply to share each other’s developed capability and create supplementary competitive advantage in areas the two would not have separately.

In conclusion, we believe together with Angwin and Meadows (2015, p. 236) and Ellis and Lamont (2004, p. 99) that every framework has its origin in Haspeslagh and Jemison’s (1991, p. 145) conceptualization. Even though the authors not include culture explicitly, organizational autonomy regard culture to the extent of persevering organizational procedures, which we believe has been reviewed for above. However, one critic has been put forward by Angwin and Meadows (2015, p. 238) pointing at Haspeslagh and Jemison’s (1991) framework in regard of diversified acquisitions. Angwin and Meadows (2015, p. 238) insinuate acquisitions not necessarily aim to create value in the delineation from Haspeslagh and Jemison (1991, p. 22), but can instead be aimed to profit from different tax rates in different companies, and thus have no intention to create value. Also, Angwin and Meadows (2015, p. 238) forward their concern about the framework’s disregard of pre-merger antecedents – factors in pre-merger negotiation can affect the integration approach variously and thus needs to be regarded, however the framework exclude such factors. Conclusively, as can be seen below (see Figure 1), Ellis and Lamont (2004, p. 84) present a comprehensive framework including all approaches in relationship to each other. Normal text represents Haspeslagh and Jemison (1991), text between parentheses is Nahavandi and Malekzadeh (1988) and bold Marks and Mirvis (2001).
3.1.5 Challenges in cross-border versus domestic M&A

Ahammad and Glaister (2011, p. 59) mention M&As and cross-border acquisitions as an increasingly used strategy of global expansion when a firm turns international. In this strategy, focus lies on the competences and intelligence that are obtained by acquiring another firm – even if half of all cross-border M&As tend to be considered as a failure. Ahammad and Glaister, (2011, p. 59) emphasize some obstacles of compatibility of organizational values that cross-border acquisitions face; such differences of behaviors and philosophies that can lead to negative emotions of managers. For example, anxiety, insecurity, frustration – which foster – communication issues, conflicts, lower commitment and decreased job performance (Ahammad & Glaister, 2011, p. 59-60).

Morresi and Pezzi (2014, p. 118-119) tell that potential drawbacks also can be related to speed in deal closing and integration. The cross-border acquisition strategy by acquiring a subsidiary company is a great opportunity, if managed properly, to strengthen an organization’s sustainable competitive advantage (Ahammad & Glaister, 2011, p. 62; Björkman et al., 2007, p. 11; Chakrabarti et al., 2009, p. 217). Some authors claim that acquisitions overseas could be more valuable in regards of wider cultural distance because the acquiring company gains a broader range of capabilities compared to domestic acquisitions (Björkman et al., 2007, p. 11; Piekkari, Vaara, Tienari & Säntti, 2005, p. 332). Finally, multinational companies’ advantages are fostered from cooperation and coordination that can care for knowledge and competence across border acquisitions (Ahammad & Glaister, 2011, p. 62).

Cross-border mergers are often more demanding than domestic acquisitions in regards of what type of knowledge and skills that are required for success. Schweiger and Goulet (2000, p. 77) write that many firms tend to provide their managers with more general knowledge about business rather than cross-border acquisitions capabilities in the M&A process. Cultural differences have been highlighted as important in the cross-border M&A process in order to understand a partner company – in aspects of successful integration and learning. These authors emphasize it is even more critical and hardly managed in the in the post-acquisition integration (Schweiger & Goulet, 2000, p. 77; Ahammad & Glaister, 2011, p. 62; Björkman et al., 2007, p. 11). Therefore, capability transfer of cross-border skills and knowledge of managers to understand culture and other differences should be a primary objective in cross-border acquisitions (Björkman et al., 2007, p. 22). Moreover, some authors declare that cultural differences in overseas acquisitions should be even more carefully managed in comparison to domestic combinations (Schweiger & Goulet, 2000, p. 69). Piekkari et al. (2005, p. 332) enlighten misunderstandings and cultural juxtaposition when employees fail to be integrated properly in the post-merger phase and when employees are not willing to identify themselves with a new firm. This is clearly challenging and reflects upon the management
of cross-border acquisitions in the post-merger integration. One statement presented by Shimizu et al. (2004, p. 334) is that deals with more cultural distant countries have a greater potential to gain value and learn from the resources that are acquired. Furthermore, institutional differences increase the challenges in the M&A process, but greater opportunities, because cross-border M&As can enhance new sources of information and capabilities, which can render in strategic flexibility from a learning theory (Shimizu et al., 2004, p. 333).

3.1.6 Challenges in integration of cross-border M&A
Morresi and Pezzi (2014, p. 121) declare that the challenge with integration is to clap two separate organizations together, not only in positive aspects of creating synergies and market opportunities. Firms need to manage and implement both formal and informal processes and the authors claim that attention needs to be given in for example differences in national cultures – compared to domestic acquisitions. But also, heterogeneity in networks, structure, new or unfamiliar customers and technologies (Morresi & Pezzi, 2014, p. 121-122). Shimizu et al. (2004, p. 332) highlight three different important insights in theory regarding cross-border M&As: “(1) The cultural differences associated with acquirer and acquired firms’ home countries create additional challenges for post-M&A integration. (2) The success/performance of acquisitions depends on the integration process and adopted control systems. (3) The preferences for types of integration processes and control systems are different depending on the acquirers’ nationality”. Post-merger integration is said to even more difficult when the acquirer of a firm is situated in a different country in relation the selling firm (Shimizu et al., 2004, p. 332). Therefore, a tendency of using different control systems between the acquirer and selling firm has been outlined by previous researches as problematic, in regard to national differences (Shimizu et al., 2004, p. 333). Some authors also state that evaluation/control systems have been found to affect the post-merger integration phase performance negatively, when the degree of integration is considerably high (Morresi & Pezzi, 2014, p. 123). Contrary, when post-merger integration level is low and national cultures differences are more similar, as in domestic mergers, evaluation systems tend to not have such major impact on the integration performance (Morresi and Pezzi, p. 133). The factor of stress is stated by Shimizu et al. (2004, p. 334) to be even more present in cross-border acquisitions and could be viewed as a key obstacle for cultural integration. The authors postulate that connections with acculturative stress and lower commitment amongst employees in the acquired firm have been found in previous research (Shimizu et al., 2004, p. 334). Furthermore, lack of cooperation and executive retention along with a lower degree of financial success have been outlined, due to high degrees of acculturative stress (Shimizu et al., 2004, p. 334).

Corporate and national cultural differences, and to find a fit between the acquirer and target firm depends on the level of integration required state Shimizu et al. (2004, p. 333). For example, these differences have been outlined to affect the work between top managers from either firm – because more negatively attitudes have been noticed towards the cross-border acquisition process when the differences of culture are considered higher (Shimizu et al., 2004, p. 332). The internationalization strategy of crossing borders needs to consider different entry modes to be successful – finding the most suitable target in a new market consists of many processes. The authors suggest that the different processes of integration are dynamic and focus needs to be fixed at learning (Shimizu et al., 2004, p. 324). Importance should be emphasized on how to improve different aspects of knowledge. For instance, prior experience and to analyze the past acquirers can be used
in strive for avoiding mistakes and failures if the knowledge from previous M&A integration processes can be applied (Shimizu et al., 2004, p. 324-225). Another aspect causing challenges is the environmental, exogenous factor. The study by Rouzies, Loe Colman and Angwin (2018, p. 10) concludes that integration is bilateral affected by exogenous factors, e.g. drop in demand; two factors facilitating the integration, which are coordination and cohesion; two factors hampering integration, which are disconnection and alienation (Rouzies et al., 2018, p. 9). In essence, the article demonstrates how companies is occupied by battling the integration as an isolated project, simultaneously as managing the ordinary operations during perplexing times. Integration should thus be regarded as a co-evolving process, according to the authors, since crisis management appear parallel to planned integration (Rouzies et al., 2018, p. 8).

3.2 Perspectives on learning

3.2.1 Serial acquisition and role of previous experience

Business context learning as a process is pointed out by Reddy (2015, p. 16) to be continuous. The author presents one definition of organizational learning as “just positive experience, or the appropriate generalization of prior experience to a subsequent event” in a firm’s international strategies that is stated to have a central role (Reddy, 2015, p. 16). In theory, Reddy (2015, p. 16) writes that strategic knowledge development and learning occurs in a business from three different ways: “learning-by-doing”, followed by “learning from previous experiences” and finally “learning from observing” to gain knowledge about a business context. Jang and Daniliuc (2014, p. 8) stress the organizational learning theory and state organizations should logically learn more about the acquisition process by applying a serial acquisition strategy. Moreover, these authors claim that each M&A process experience consist of a unique context and different needs for success and subsequent performance (Jang & Daniliuc, 2014, p. 8; Haleblian et al., 2006, p. 357). Still, the organizational learning theory points out that a repeated behavior should provide general patterns of experience which could have impact on forming tacit and implicit learning by improving organizational routines (Jang & Daniliuc, 2014, p. 8; Haleblian et al., 2006, p. 357). Jang and Daniliuc (2014, p. 6-7) suggest that working in with such strategy, to gather accumulated experiences and establish organizational routines, can enhance the possibility for future competitive advantages and strategic data and be fruitful for decision-making. Furthermore, theory highlighted above could be seen as organizational theory learning-by-doing, when prior deals affect the M&A routines by previous experiences and in that case increase the acquisition performance (Jang & Daniliuc, 2014, p. 6-7).

In contrary theory, the knowledge-based-view function of a firm: “[...] indicates that the outcome of a strategic initiative of the firm is determined by the degree with which the acquiring firm develops collective abilities in managing acquisitions from prior experience” (Jang & Daniliuc, 2014, p. 6). Haleblian et al. (2006, p. 357) declare that research on organizational learning and organizational behavior is guided from routines that are generated from previous experience. Henceforth, the authors accentuate the organizational perspective and mean that learning, as a process is substantially independent of the performance from previous experiences. On the other hand, the authors write that performance feedback is an important part of organizational learning and will play a significant role of prior experience (Haleblian et al., 2006, p. 357). The behavioral theory of a firm has been said convenient for understand the context of performance, some authors emphasize that this perspective discuss adaptive behavior
over time and that this view has yet to be fully understood in relation to performance outcomes (Haleblian et al., 2006, p. 358). For an example, if a firm has good performance related to previous experience, the organization is more likely to keep the same strategies. Likewise, they are more willing to change their future behavior if the previous performance is negatively (Haleblian et al., 2006, p. 358). This viewpoint is underlined, as it should not only be related to the existence of previous experiences, but also feedback from the acquisitions that have been made in the past can influence future behavior (Haleblian et al., 2006, p. 358). Regarding this theory, the author discusses two different factors: acquisition experience and focal acquisition performance (Haleblian et al., 2006, p. 361). The authors state that M&A experience could be measured in numbers of how many previous acquisitions a firm has made; still this should not be seen as a foundation for increasing useful knowledge. For example, will old experiences become less appropriate or useful by time and therefore not always beneficial for the performance outcomes (Haleblian et al., 2006, p. 361). On the other hand, focal acquisition performance is referred to in literature as the feedback of the most recent takeover that has been made, and further the means that this feedback outcome will have a notable impact – regarding the likelihood of choosing a strategy of making subsequent acquisitions (Haleblian et al., 2006, p. 359; 361).

Galavotti et al. (2017, p. 120) write that accumulated experiences of repetitive behavior differ between domestic and cross-border aspects. They state that there is much to learn from previous activities in domestic M&A processes, which are not unique for one specific context. For instance, the post-acquisition integration and target firm selection (Galavotti et al., 2017, p. 120). Previous experiences in domestic acquisitions tend to be a weak predictor of future cross-border acquisitions compared to previous managerial experiences in acquisitions across borders (Galavotti et al., 2017, p. 121). Specific knowledge stemming from experience of diversity in environments and cultural understanding, different standards, how managers work and control mechanisms (Galavotti et al., 2017, p. 121). Furthermore, previous research has underlined that domestic experience in the past negatively affects the future strategies for international entry (Galavotti et al., 2017, p. 128). Hence, previous experiences in domestic acquisition can provide valuable general knowledge that can be used in international acquisitions to decrease the risks known in serial cross-border acquisitions (Galavotti et al., 2017, p. 128). Aktas et al. (2013, p. 110) declare that the factor of time is important when we try to learn from previous experiences. In theory, short periods of time to deadline or lack of focus on organizational learning can be destructive when acquisitions are too distant in cross-border acquisitions, which can lead to effects that people involved within the M&A process is caused by memory losses (Aktas et al., 2013, p. 110). Henceforth, learning-by-doing should be reflected upon in degrees of similarities across M&As between acquirer and targeted organization (Aktas et al., 2013, p. 110). Further, the role of heterogeneity and previous experiences from acquisitions has been brought up in terms differences of industries and geographic regions, which can improve or impede positive performance. Therefore, some experiences can be more valuable than others in repetitive serial acquisitions (Aktas et al., 2013, p. 110; 116).

Smit and Moraitis (2010, p. 57) mention a strategic acquisition dilemma of choosing the right targets in a serial acquisition process. Understanding market value and adjust for changing landscape in the operating industry is said to be critical for success (Smit & Moraitis, 2010, p. 57). Moreover, the authors state that the serial acquisition process is complex and failure at one step can be destructive in strategic measures. King et al. (2004,
underscore a term of relatedness of acquired firms in previous literature, which could impact the post-performance when two firms are combined. Moreover, the term of relatedness is said to cause positive effects when there is a similarity between the resources and markets (industry-familiarity) between the acquirer and targeted firm (King et al., 2004, p.189-190; Smit & Moraitis, 2010, p. 57). Therefore, when relatedness is more significant, top managers can more easily understand the environment, as King et al. (2004, p.189) state: “[…] effectively employ their dominant logic, or common conceptualization of the success requirements in the acquired business”. The acquiring firm’s opportunities are higher in order to facilitate the M&A process by already using relevant valuable existing resources (King et al., 2004, p. 190). Also, when top-management involvement is considerable high in the process of a new business combination – familiarity of firms is underlined as a key success factor (King et al., 2004, p. 189-190). Conclusively, theory accentuate the learning from previous serial acquisitions and the input of understanding by managers, which is said to have a major impact on the post-acquiring process performance (King et al., 2004, p. 189-190).

Consistent finding whether relationships from previous acquisitions and the post-acquisition performance is vague. The fact that success in later acquisitions can be predicted from past serial acquires (King et al., 2004, p. 190). The process of M&A fosters challenges and complexity; experiences from previous acquisition integration from both individuals and organizations can avoid problems. The lack of commitment all the way from CEOs towards co-workers can increase costs and be challenging when unfamiliarity occurs in the change (King et al., 2004, p. 190). Galavotti et al. (2017, p. 129) mention overconfidence in serial acquisitions. They suggest that there is a tendency that managers become to facile towards new acquisitions and relies too strongly on their accumulated experience of serial M&A’s. This phenomenon can be vital when the risk of failure is underestimated, when very experienced firms repeat past behavior (Galavotti et al., 2017, p. 129; Smit & Moraitis, 2010, p. 60). Moreover, the early findings from Halebian and Finkelstein (1999, p. 45) was later accentuated by Barkema and Schijven (2008) regarding the transfer effects from previous acquisitions to subsequent acquisitions, that is, an U-shaped relationship will form if companies proceed with unrelated deals. Halebian and Finkelstein (1999, p. 45) found that positive transfer effects follows related acquisitions, where experience is relatively relevant to be applied.

3.2.2 Organizational routines
Organizational routines have been claimed by researchers to be a central asset of human organization; a source that can initiate change but also increase stability into firms (Feldman & Pentland, 2003, p. 95-97; Felin, Foss, Heimeriks & Madsen, 2012, p. 1364). We found definitions regarding the view of routines as a capability in past research, while the traditional view often emphasizes organizational routines as a structure that applies in a more collective manner than individual phenomena (Felin et al., 2012, p. 1356). One definition is outlaid by Felin et al., (2012, p. 1355): “It is widely accepted that routines are ‘repetitive, recognizable patterns of interdependent actions, carried out by multiple actors’”. Further, the authors also underline that this definition focuses more on interactions than looking at the individual aspects (Felin et al., 2012, p. 1355). Clarified that interactions for example could be considered as the process of coordinate routines (values, norms and deliberate collective rules etc.), while the individual aspects for an example could be skills, knowledge and experience; both considered as important for organizational prosperity (Felin et al., 2012, p. 1358; 1362). Criticism towards one pure “core” definition in the concept of organizational routines has partly been discussed by
Feldman and Pentland (2003, p. 95), who claim organizational routines to be more comprehensive than a single definition. For example, organizational routines are a source for change and should not been pointed out to be only static and unchangeable structure – while more understanding of the dynamics is needed. Routines are to their nature multifaceted, agency addressing the factors of power and subjectivity of organizational routines, and how they are performed by different individuals in different factors of time and place (Feldman & Pentland, 2003, p. 93). Specifically, power of organizational routines is stated as to monitor the workforce and ensure that organizational routines are followed (Feldman & Pentland, 2003, p. 110). The function of organizational routines is claimed by these authors to reduce costs, create flexibility, suppress conflicts and to be a factor for better control and in that way contribute to the organization (Feldman & Portland, 2003, p. 99). Contrary, they can also cause inertia and mindlessness. Furthermore, Feldman and Portland (2003, p. 98) emphasize organizational learning and the view of routines as a key component of this organizational learning theory “In this theoretical tradition, routines play the role of memory” and “They are conceptualizing as a way to store knowledge and capabilities”.

Felin et al. (2012, p. 1351) emphasize the micro foundations of routines and capabilities. From previous research reviews, authors found what they state as three primary categories of micro-level components that underpin capabilities and routines, that is: individuals, social processes and structures (Felin et al., 2012, p. 1351). Such approach as micro foundations is used mainly to uncover competitive heterogeneity (Felín et al., 2012, p. 1351-1352). In theory regarding the first category with the role of the individual, the behavioral theory has been enlightened frequently (Felin et al., 2012, p. 1358-1359). Behavioral theory focuses on how individuals function along with psychological foundations, more specifically, what happens on individual level considerations (Felin et al., 2012, p. 1359). One question raised is how personal interests will affect the aggregate collective behavior when knowledge, preferences and information are distinctive (Felin et al., 2012, p. 1359-61). Secondly, social processes have been said to be “time-dependent processes necessarily inform routines and capabilities in two fundamental ways” (Felin et al., 2012, p. 1362). Firstly, emphasized as a process of different activities that occurs independently. Secondly, how individual’s interventions take place when activities are taken into action (Felin et al., 2012, p. 1362). They continue to state that methods of coordination and integration are declared to be an important part of social processes, by example of formal and informal coordination (standard procedures and experience, values etc.). Further, the authors reflect upon how to sustain capabilities, flexibility and stability, in recurring actions by deliberate collective rules (Felin et al., 2012, p. 1362). The last category of structure is highlighted by Felin et al. (2012, p. 1364-65) as how the organizational form will affect routines and capabilities. The authors claim that activities will be impacted in different manners if the structure is tall, flat, matrix, virtual matrix and network form. Information sharing, knowledge sharing, how routines can be recognized and how to build capabilities is discussed in terms of effective coordination and information sharing from influence of organizational structure (Felin et al., 2012, p. 1364-65).

In theory, organizational capabilities have been understood as high-level routines, this view points out routines as input for capabilities along with learning, experience and other resources (Felin et al., 2012, p. 1355). Dynamic capabilities can help firms to increase their competitive heterogeneity in aspects of create, modify or extend a firm’s service. Sources of differences between capabilities and routines have been discussed by Felin et al. (2012, p. 1355-56), who declare that capabilities and routines can be more or less rigid
and flexible which is context dependent. Furthermore, the authors pinpoint the fact that rigid routines must be carried out by its unique set of requirements to be proceeded, which relies on accumulated experiences for achieving prosperity in coordination (Felin et al., 2012, p. 1356). Furthermore, some capabilities have been identified in past literature as capabilities of “zero level”, “first order” and “high order” (Felin et al., 2012, p. 1356). Moreover, the authors tell specifically that “zero-level” capabilities constitute routines of daily operations. One example is given, according to the writers, that successful serial acquirers customize their routines in relationship to each business case (Felin et al., 2012, p. 1356). Hence, the authors declare successful serial acquirers: “[...] adjust their (zero-order) codified routines using higher-order routines in the form of risk management and tacit knowledge transfer practices” (Felin et al., 2012, p. 1356).

Howard-Grenville (2005, p. 629-630) presents a flexibility model, which according to the author sheds light over identified factors that contribute towards flexible routines performance and the persistence of the routines over time. Further, Howard-Grenville (2005, p. 629) declares that ”it depicts how routines are enacted in response to the intentions and orientations of individual actors, which in turn are informed by the situation at hand and the artifacts and social expectations generated from prior enactments of the routine”. Clearly, the model portrays a view of routines as not fixed but more on-going accomplishment by individuals. The author emphasizes the view how “structurationists” define routines: as structures of practices, but each time enactment is executed, routines are recreated or revised (Howard-Grenville, 2005, p. 629). The model consists partly of performative and ostensive area of routines. Performative aspects are said to be “collective performance of routines” and the ostensive aspects are pointed out in the model as “Artifacts and social expectations – produced by prior enactments of routine” (Howards-Grenville, 2005, p. 629). Context related factors as “situation at hand” along with the ostensive information processes in the model towards actor’s intentions and orientations discharge into the last phase of the performative factors presented (Howard-Grenville, 2005, p. 629). Briefly, one can say that his model shows that the formation is flexible, yet persistent routines are explained further, and that the individual’s role is essential and will affect the recreation or revising or an organizational routine (Howard-Grenville, 2005, p. 630).

3.2.3 Dynamic capabilities
The research field on dynamic capabilities has contributed with scattered suggestions in definitions and conceptualizations, enriching the body of literature with a divergent orientation (Barreto, 2009, p. 257; Mohamud & Sarpong, 2016, p. 512). In order to fully grasp the idea of dynamic capabilities, it is important to distinguish between three key concepts according to Mohamud and Sarpong (2016, p. 512): (1) resources, that is, all physical, intellectual and human assets owned by one firm, e.g. factory, patent or human capital; (2) capabilities, that is, to what extent a company can utilize its resources and; (3) competences, that is, a firm’s capacity to perform with either efficiency of effectiveness. Easterby-Smith et al. (2009, p. 4) posit utilization of resources as a vital part in the nature of the notion. Thus, dynamic capabilities can be found across the organization, ranging from new product development capabilities to acquisition capabilities (Easterby-Smith et al., 2009, p. 4). Hence, the authors continue to suggest that in long-term, dynamic capabilities can either progress or even decline, given its debated dependence on change (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 5). An interesting discourse regarding the topic focuses on whether environmental change, both internal and external, is requisite in creating dynamic capabilities (Mohamud & Sarpong, 2016, p. 518). Given the fact that research
on the topic is disparate, different conceptualizations have been presented since Teece et al. (1997) first published their work. We will review four different conceptualizations below, which are from each other dissimilar in their fundamental notion of dynamic capabilities to some extent.

Teece et al. (1997, p. 510), in their first description of the phenomena, delineate dynamic capabilities through a company’s “[...] ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments”. It is important keep in mind that Teece’s et al. (1997, p. 510) viewpoint of dynamic capabilities roots in the resource-based view of a company, which regard resources as static, however dynamic capabilities is the process of vigorous flow of these else static resources. Interestingly, Teece et al. (1997, p. 510) involve the variable of environment in their description, which suggest dynamic capabilities can only exist if velocity is high, thus not be evolved in stable environments. The concept of environment is dividing the research field according to Barreto (2009, p. 262). Hence, it is important for firms to bear in rapidly changing contexts, and through their situation develop dynamic capabilities in order to achieve competitive advantage. In their article, Teece et al. (1997, p. 510) argue for its necessity in building competitive advantages, since development of hard-to-imitate capabilities through process routines are key components of dynamic capabilities. The authors therefore posit a clear relationship between the phenomena and competitive advantage (Teece et al., 1997, p. 511). Additionally, what concerns the source of evolution, the creation mechanisms for dynamic capabilities, emphasis is placed upon generation of intangible assets. Hence, tacit knowledge is described to be challenging in the context of dynamic capabilities creation (Mohamud & Sarpong, 2016, p. 515). In order to solve the problem of extracting intangible knowledge only residing in the individual, efforts in codification of tacit knowledge is critical and structures that facilitate codification needs to be put in place (Teece et al., 1997, p. 525).

Zollo and Winter (2002, p. 5) position themselves differently in their delineation of dynamic capabilities. The authors take a step from the resource-based view and instead adopt a knowledge-based view of dynamic capabilities by stating they stem from knowledge ultimately (Mohamud & Sarpong, 2016, p. 515). Zollo and Winter (2002, p. 5) suggest that the purpose of dynamic capabilities is to enhance effectiveness in the organization, underlining effectiveness as the goal with creating capabilities. To greater extent than Teece et al. (1997), routines are ascribed greater importance by Zollo and Winter (2002, p. 4). There are two types of routines: operational routines, that is, everyday dependent routines for daily operations to work (Zollo and Winter, 2002, p. 4). The other type of routines is developed to rework operational routines, thus almost meta-routines, which are called dynamic capabilities (Zollo and Winter, 2002, p. 4). Henceforth, the authors make it clear that routines play an important role, as they come in different orders. Although, the greatest focus is placed upon underlying mechanisms to develop the routines: learning mechanism (Zollo and Winter, 2002, p. 6). Especially three traits are highlighted, that is, companies need to accumulate relevant experience, articulate this knowledge and subsequently codify the knowledge (Zollo and Winter, 2002, p. 36). We will have reasons to return to this approach further below, where we review deliberate learning mechanisms exhaustively.

Eisenhardt and Martin (2000, p. 1107), as well as Teece et al. (1997, p. 21), extends dynamic capabilities to the resource-based view of a company. In their view, change is ever present; within dynamic markets, manipulation of a firm’s resources through
strategic processes creates value through better best-practice processes (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000, p. 1106). In given perspective, resources work as foundation upon which altered strategies and processes are formed to fully exploit existing resources (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000, p. 1106). Also, repetitive habit together with previous experience work as mechanisms (Barreto, 2009, p. 262). Routines work as managers’ tools in recombining how the firm utilizes assets, and in the extension, they form competitive advantages (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000, p. 1106). Considering the approach origins in resource-based view, the authors suggest routines combine resources in order to create value; for example, in product development is managers (i.e. human resources) combined with other employees with a different skill set or background, thus utilizing particular knowhow to engage in new-creation, which leads to competitive advantage (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000, p. 1107). Important to note, however, is that the capabilities themselves are not competitive advantage; instead, it’s the reconfigurations created that results in competitive advantage. This is because lack of uniqueness and non-transferability of the dynamic capabilities in their nature, but their combination is unique. In regards of environmental aspects, dynamic capabilities are not only important in highly volatile context, but is as needed where change follows foreseeable patterns, which differs from above authors (Barreto, 2009, p. 262).

Lastly, Ambrosini and Bowman (2009, p. 29) emanate their perspective with the VRIN model, stating that in order for competitive advantage to be achieved, resources need to be valuable, rare, non-inimitable and non-substitutable – a model frequently used in strategic management (Ambrosini & Bowman, 2009, p. 29). When firms possess such VRIN resource, however, rigidly in process is a plausible consequence. Therefore, the authors suggest that supplementary to resources that makes competitive advantage – dynamic capabilities are a necessity to avoid inflexibility to arise (Ambrosini & Bowman, 2009, p. 33). Consequently, the authors argue that dynamic capabilities simply are the ability to rejuvenate the competitive resources’ interaction, thus the outcomes. Derived from that conclusion, the authors state that acquisitions may stand subject to be dynamic capabilities (Ambrosini & Bowman, 2009, p. 35). For example, a merger between two companies implies two different sets of resources – more or less state-of-art – blend and thus become something new. Subsequently, the processes by which controls and extracts value from this new set of resources accordingly is targeting to be a dynamic capability (Ambrosini & Bowman, 2009, p. 34). Conclusively, recombination in post-merger integration phase, where value emerges, is to be regarded competitive advantage given the fact it is a dynamic capability.

In order to compare above perspectives, we see foremost two distinctive traits: concept of environment and magnitude of routines. Even though dynamic capabilities have been ascribed as processes to handle resources, rather than resources themselves, different authors placearious focus on either processes or routines (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 5; Ambrosini & Bowman, 2009, p. 31). For instance, Zollo and Winter (2002, p. 5) emphasize routines as the key outcome with dynamic capabilities as underlying mechanism, and through deliberate learning mechanisms promoting the capabilities. On the other hand, Teece et al. (1997, p. 510) argue for rejuvenation in internal and external competences in volatile environments as key component to dynamic capabilities, with learning mentioned in their study, but not any further magnitude placed upon them. Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000, p. 1107) support Zollo and Winter’s (2002, p. 6) view of routines, which are the outcome of engaging in recombining resources. We can draw the parallel of difference in attitudes towards outcomes and process. Elaborately, Zollo and
Winter (2002) and Ambrosini and Bowman (2009) place a greater deal of focus on the fact that not only is recombination and deployment of resources dynamic capabilities, but also the outcomes. As can be seen, Teece et al. (1997) and Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) focus deeper on the process itself, and refining strategies connected to it. Best practice and regenerative processes constitute dynamic capabilities even if enhanced outcome follows. Albeit, we are aware they mention it by correlating dynamic capabilities with competitive advantage. But as mentioned by Easterby-Smith et al. (2009, p. 4), dynamic capabilities have the risk of getting rusty or decay if not continuously revitalized. We also reserve ourselves by drawing perfect parallel between dynamic capabilities and performance, with regards of causal ambiguity between the variables.

3.2.4 Deliberate learning
Learning has by scholars been assumed to be a consequence of experience, thus claiming all experience render in learning (Barkema & Shijven, 2008, p. 596). This perspective of the learning curve draws a causal relationship between experiences and learning, postulating learning outcomes requisite solely experience, independent of mediating efforts. Additionally, Barkema and Shijven (2008, p. 596) state the learning curve perspective ascribes all experience as progressive, albeit research concludes inappropriate generalization of experience could potentially be disadvantageous for a firm (Haleblian & Finkelstein, 1999, p. 51). In contemplation of advancing the understanding of learning, researchers have suggested the literature and managers to move away from the assumption “learning-by-doing” is sufficient to create or maintain knowledge within the organization (Zollo & Singh, 2004, p. 1254). Instead, a more methodical approach should be adopted to ensure experiences are subsequently transferred to the shape of tangible and visible knowledge, that is, knowledge by which competencies could nurture from and be taught to a greater amount of people within the organization than simply concerned parties (Winter & Zollo, 2002, p. 349). Namely, this approach is called deliberate learning.

As for most organizations, uncertainty is present in every-day operations; providing opportunities together with imminent threat of survival. In order to cope with looming uncertainty, routines are developed to automatize processes and furnish predictable outcomes (Felin et al., 2012, p. 1355). Hence, deliberate learning mechanisms builds upon two pillars tightly connected to uncertainty: frequency and heterogeneous activities, which both potentially impedes predictability in outcomes (Zollo & Singh, 2004, p. 1253). For instance, with M&A serving as event, it is safe to say such event infers low frequency (for most companies) with high heterogeneity given its vast nature with multiple activities interconnected. Therefore, Zollo and Singh (2004, p. 1240) proclaim the importance of learning from sporadic and various activities, as acquisitions constitute, in order to withstand and create organizational awareness when dealing with irregular events. It is important to be aware of the hierarchy deliberate learning, dynamic capabilities and routines exist in, thus all three elements are not self-sufficient in creation but dependent of each other’s existence. Zollo and Winter (2002, p. 340) presented the relationship in their study, showing that underlying learning mechanisms are central activities in order to ultimately create routines. As discussed above about dynamic capabilities, there are different perspectives on how these capabilities are created and subsequently customized to fulfill that perspective’s purpose of the capabilities.
3.2.5 Articulated and codified knowledge

In theory of studying organizational learning, Zollo and Winter (2002, p. 341) claims that deliberate processes are not appreciated enough. Deliberate processes in that meaning when both individuals and groups reflect upon an organizational task, containing vital questions like: What works? And what does not? Henceforth, collective learning has been said to occur when individuals get the chance to express themselves, by ventilate opinions and different believes, and when other individual’s views challenge those opinions and beliefs in a constructive way (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 341). Further, the outcome from above statement, is that organizational competences that a firm possess, can be enhanced when individuals increases the degree of awareness of their actions related to organizational performance (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 341). Meckl (2004, p. 461) suggests it is important to store the knowledge from before and after the M&A process. The author enlightens the fact that experiences has shown that transfer documents and protocols between different acquisitions have some pitfalls. For instance, in terms of adequate transfer of previous experiences and results (Meckl, 2004, p. 461).

Challenges of project organizations faced by post-merger integration teams, are said to arise when structures, responsibilities and individuals is some changing factor, important information and learnings are lost in the process of change (Meckl, 2004, p. 461). Zollo & Winter (2002, p. 341-342) mention one mechanism in collective competence improvement: “the process through which implicit knowledge is articulated through collective discussions, debriefing sessions, and performance evaluation processes”. They further stress shared experiences and insights, which can facilitate collective development and higher the understanding for future organizational tasks that can be faced and therefore also improve overall performance (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 341-342). Henceforth, writers claim that only a small amount of articulated knowledge is in the matter of fact clearly exposed. Firms differ in that degree connected to substantially in how this process in managed and presented as articulated statements of an organization (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 341-342). Hence, it could be said that emphasis need to be put on how to articulate knowledge. According to above statement, efforts arise from commitment of members from the group of individuals in the organization (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p.341-342). Meckl (2004, p. 461) mentions a learning effect, that previous experience from one past deal might be institutionalized into the subsequent ones, which could be very fruitful in terms of performance. Then managers can identify challenges and learn from how they have managed them in previous contexts (Meckl, 2004, p. 461). Moreover, the outcome of those efforts towards articulated knowledge could provide new understanding and changes linked to performance, which can lead to adjustment of routines and recognition in the need for change (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p.341-342).

Zollo & Winter (2002, p. 342) suggest that the step beyond knowledge articulation is known as knowledge codification. Emphasis on cognitive efforts is necessary when individuals transfer their understandings and experiences from performance onto different tools such blueprints, manuals and systems (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 342). Hence, the knowledge articulation should provide the opportunity of knowledge codification, therefore, in a deliberate way put up a linkage between what actions that are made and understand how that will affect the organizational performance (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 342). The function of codified knowledge is to ease the diffusion process of accumulated knowledge, which should be available for individuals to take part of (Singh & Zollo, 1998, p. 17-18). Furthermore, knowledge codification tools should be descriptive in that sense of explaining different contexts of ‘know-what’, ‘know-how’
and lead to the individual understanding of ‘know-why’ (Singh & Zollo, 1998, p. 17-18). Moreover, knowledge codification can have additional functions more than in aspects of learning a specific task. Singh and Zollo (1998, p. 17-18) mention the creation of capabilities, awareness about the codification process itself and solution orientations. It is important in aspects of creating supporting mechanisms, identify strengths and weaknesses in changes and re-structure routines and other new proposals (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 342).

Moreover, knowledge codifications also need to be established by the fact that individuals or collective groups successfully can use a manual or artefact with useful future guiding and in negotiation with others (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 342). Benefits by strategically putting efforts on knowledge codification can enhance decision-making and sense-making in relation to performance implications (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 342). Contrary, the fact that these benefits in managerial aspects not always come for free; costs related to time spent by managers, resources and investments in reconfigure, and updating knowledge codification tools (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 342). Further, there is also a tendency of risk related to misapprehension and inferior development of routines (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 342). Nevertheless, higher degree of integration has been found positively related to codification by manage and implement different tasks. Hence, when lower levels of integration are present, knowledge codification could impede the process of integration (bureaucratization) and affect the performance indicator of the acquisition (Singh & Zollo, 1998, p. 22). Knowledge codification has been underlined as a factor of superior performance, previous research has also shown that managers should strive to find the optimal level of knowledge codification with regards to the extent of the post-mergers integration (Singh & Zollo, 1998, p. 31-32). Moreover, codification has shown to strengthen post-acquisitions performance and decreasing figures in for example the replacement of higher-level managers (Singh & Zollo, 1998, p. 31-32).

3.2.6 Sharing and internalization of knowledge

Following the proposed outline from Kale and Singh (2007, p. 985), we proceed from articulation and codification of knowledge to sharing and internalization, to finalize their theorized chronology. In accordance with our chosen point of departure, the knowledge-based view of the firm, Grant (1996, p. 111) accentuates the role of transferability of knowledge within a firm. Kale and Singh (2007, p. 985), who also build their study on KBV, suggest sharing of know-how follows as next step after having articulated and codified the relevant experience and knowledge. For instance, sharing may occur through interaction amongst the employees and management in forums, workshops or less formal settings (e.g. in the corridors or face-to-face conversations) in which knowledge is disseminated (Draulans, DeMan & Volberda, 2003, p. 159). According to Kale and Singh (2007, p. 986), the importance of sharing stems from Grant’s (1996, p. 111) transferability, with the ultimate goal of spreading personally held experience to create a resolute knowledge, but also align redundancy in the information flow. However, there are differences in the empirical findings how sharing is best practiced for the firm to achieve organizational learning and M&A performance.

One drawback is presented by March, Sproull and Tamuz (2003, p. 467) in their article about how organizations learn from a sample of one of fewer. It eludes in the process of learning as one defined notion; most often, employees in a firm undergoing an acquisition interpret the process differently. The authors argue for the complexity in both reliability and validity of the learning itself. Reliability in a learning context recalls how stable is
the procedures of sense-making of historical (March et al., 2003, p. 468). More explicit, how does a firm create a shared understanding of the historical event, to subsequently be able to draw learnings. The authors argue that meaning could not be regarded self-evident but needs to be articulated and created within the organization (March et al., 2003, p. 469). Hence, a reliable learning process needs to be installed in order to extract and create such knowledge. Validity, on the other hand, in terms of learning, connotes to the causality of historical occurrences. With only a few observations, elimination of biases and puzzling of historical event’s interrelatedness could be difficult to figure (March et al., 2003, p. 468). Seldom events could be interpreted as stochastic, with chronological variables hard to distinguish in the after-match of an event. Thus, the learnings may be biased given complexities in validating what actually happened (March et al., 2003, p. 468).

Moreover, there are different theories how knowledge sharing is best implemented to attain its true value. Brown and Duguid (1991, p. 48) discuss the magnitude of creating communities, of forums, in which the focal knowledge is not only discussed – but also exercised. As the authors mention: “the central issue in learning is becoming a practitioner not learning about practice” (Brown and Duguid, 1991, p. 48). Communities in this theory constitute the nurturing environment in which employees become practitioners instead of trainees or participants of training programs. This theory gets support from Junni (2011, p. 317) in her article about knowledge transfer. Junni (2011, p. 317) argues that tacit knowledge, which is the most difficult to disseminate given it is socially embedded, could benefit in terms of transfer if a social identity prevails. Theorizing about communities, Brown and Duguid (1991, p. 48) implicitly project a group identity of the members, which in case could facilitate transfer in accordance with Junni’s (2011, p. 317) theory.

Following sharing knowledge does internalization, which is not too distinct in transmission from sharing. However, through internalization, the emphasis lies within absorption of know-how and not only exposure (Kale and Singh, 2007, p. 986). Despite exposure of know-how, through sharing, individuals are not guaranteed learning to the extent of transforming explicit knowledge to personal held tacit knowledge (Kale and Singh, 2007, p. 986). Revisiting the knowledge-based view of a firm, Nonaka (1994, p. 20) highlights that learning is triggered when individuals manage to interchange explicit and tacit knowledge and transform it to practicalities. Thus, understanding the interplay between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge, together with actively applying it and absorptive capacity, enhance internalization of know-how (Nonaka, 1994, p. 20; Kale & Singh, 2007, p. 986). Also, learning transpires within social contexts; in where the applicable knowledge can be identified through interaction, not only reinforcement, according to Kogut and Zander (1996, p. 510). Further, Kale and Singh (2007, p. 986) continues to argue that when an individual has reached the stage of internalization of know-how, the threshold to absorb new knowledge is lower and thus easier. Draulans et al. (2003, p. 156) found in their article that internalization of previous experiences, creating a structure around learning with named steps, boosts success rates of alliances. The authors also found evidence of how internalization is best applied, depending on the experience and firm size.

Firstly, Draulans et al. (2003, p. 158) examined how evaluation of alliances affected the overall learning of the experiences. The two evaluation methods were either individual or cross-sectional; implying that parent company compares its experiences of alliance
with company A and company B simultaneously and together with one another – not individual examination. Draulans et al. (2003, p. 159) found that firms having undergone fewer acquisitions than five could not enjoy any success of comparison, with the motivation of too low knowledge base. Hence, if the experiences fall short of five deals, individual examination furnishes the learning. We can see the connection to March et al. (2003, p. 468) theory of validity; if the experience does not qualify in quantity, causal relationships may be deluded and falsely interpreted. Further, Draulans et al. (2003, p. 157) found that firms having done more than five acquisitions, cross-sectional comparison showed positive results. An explanation is given that points at saturation of experience; if the number exceeds five, there is nothing new to learn from individual comparison, but the firm needs to interconnect the alliances and see how the interplay between them can draw learnings for the firm (Draulans et al., 2003, p. 158).

Sluyts, MatthysSENS, Martens and Streukens (2011, p. 882) examined each individual role of articulation, codification, sharing and internalization on overall performance of alliances. Their result indicated only two variables, namely codification and sharing, moderated the overall performance with statistical significance. Articulation and internalization as learning mechanisms showed no positive significance for learning (Sluyts et al., 2011, p. 882). However, the two variables were found not to be redundant; instead, the authors state articulation and internalization work as important prerequisite for facilitating codification and sharing (Sluyts et al., 2011, p. 882). Despite their postulation of the latter variables necessity, other researchers found all four to have a direct positive effect on alliance performance. Shakeri and Radfar (2017, p. 298) found a positive statistical significance when measuring the impact of all four variables on strategic alliance performance. Moreover, the authors suggest all four variables needs to be compiled and transformed into routines, to create a stable and systematical procedure for learning (Shakeri and Radfar, 2017, p. 298). We believe this can be connected to the knowledge-based view of a firm presented by Nonaka (1994). Explicitly, we believe the connection between Shakeri and Radfar (2017) and Nonaka (1994) lies within both authors suggestion to model and choose mechanisms for interchange of explicit and tacit knowledge. In doing so, the systematical approach will furnish a stable process of internalizing the knowledge and thus create a knowledge-base to build upon (Nonaka, 1994, p. 20; Shakeri & Radfar, 2017, p. 298; March et al., 2003, p. 468).

3.3 Summary of theoretical framework and selection of theoretical tool

3.3.1 Perspectives on Mergers & Acquisitions

In focal literature review, strategic expansion by merging or acquiring another firm could be found as paramount in growing popularity. Noticeable, indicated failure rates amongst M&As are considerable high. For example, in terms of financial performance, profit and ROI, underlying several challenges of the human factor in the M&A process. The life-cycle of merger and acquisition often comprise different functions operating in teams, thus, to cope with the early pre-merger phase on to the post-merger integration efforts. Reasons for failure analysis has been outlined in three major concepts in previous literature as: strategic issues, financial issue and human related issues. Hence, failures in M&As can be reflected upon hard and soft factors. For example, incorrect calculations in valuation and costs related to the process and market shares. Hubris and overconfidence of managers from previous acquisitions may also occur. Different soft factors could be recognised as cultural differences of target and buying firm, the readiness in the
organizational settings for rapid change and transparency with effective communication to hinder uncertainty in the M&A process. Reasons for success have partly been pointed out in the role of communication regarding the negotiation phase. Where importance between acquirer and the acquired will strive for and have similar expectations. Especially, in a cross-border acquisition context, when greater cultural differences are present. Setting up integrations teams along the M&A process has been identified as a success factor. Consequently, commitment from the whole organization can enhance performance. The value generation focus, by applying a growth strategy of either merging or acquiring another firm, is well rooted in previous literature as synergy effects. Mainly three different effects of production, technological and organisational synergies for creating prosperity.

In linking pre-merger phase with the post-merger phase, decision making has been found as central in the early stages of the M&A process. Previous decisions will affect strategic outcomes in the further phases. Importance have been given for value creation to emerge by two different foundations, strategic and organisational fit. To what extent the target company matches the acquirer in market and industry factors. Also, in internal characteristics as practices of cultural and administrative features. Different approaches of post-merger integration have been emphasised in our literature review. In consent with the M&A process-view as frequently co-occurring, which is a central point for our further positioning. Moreover, focus from our stance will be held on cross-border M&As. Issues in lacking commitment, clear communication and decreased job performance are outlined as even more vital in a cross-border context compared to domestic challenges. Commonly explained as challenging because of greater cultural distances and higher prerequisites in the acquiring firm’s capabilities. Further, withdrawn from the previous research, post-M&A integration facing a lot of challenges. For example, implementing new structures, integrate heterogeneity of networks, customers and technological conditions. Two differences, stated as corporate and national culture need to be properly managed in the post-merger integration phase, to enhance performance and success. One takeaway is that different dynamic processes of integration should strive to focus on learning. On how to constantly improve the organizational knowledge and analyse past acquires for avoiding deficient performance and M&A integration failure.

3.3.2 Perspectives on learning
Our theoretical framework strives to highlight the most important discourses in connection to perspectives of learning in a context of mergers and acquisitions. The notion of dynamic capabilities inhabits a varied range of conceptualizations, depending on authors. However, understanding circles around the trinity of resources, capabilities and competences, and to what degree each component is utilized. Magnitude of environment and routines separate the authors’ conceptualization most, within which dynamic capabilities are created and what renders as outcome. Organizational routines have been ascribed to initiate change and both create or reduce inertia. Routines have been described as pivotal for storage of knowledge, providing stability and clarity in the every-day operations. Also, different layers of routines in which high-order routines are installed to modify operation routines, for rejuvenation to be ever present. Previous experience has been argued to provide companies with delicate complexities; conditional of context, heterogeneity and numbers of acquisitions, experience cannot be regarded as panacea for success. Instead, experience may deduce in inferior performance due to inappropriate generalization. Previous acquisitions cannot be regarded as predictor for future triumph. Deliberate learning has been delineated to be a further, more initiated,
effort of advancing learning-by-doing to actually treat learning as terminus – not as collateral benefit from undertaking planned actions. Within the notion of deliberate learning, our leading theory has been articulation, codification, sharing and internalizing, which serves as founding pillars in terms of activities to achieve learning. Articulation counts for the activity of transforming inbound knowledge, tacit knowledge, to explicit knowledge in forms of words. Codification implies transforming the spoken word to printed materials, e.g. manuals or blueprints. Sharing strives to disseminate know-how amongst employees, through interactive workshops as example. Internalizing, which is the last activity, instead infers to what extent the individual absorbs the know-how; to which degree the knowledge is actually learned.

3.3.3 Theoretical tools

Our selected tool from the theoretical framework is an own construction (see Figure 2) that encompasses parts of perspectives on mergers and acquisitions and perspectives on learning. Notably, we have chosen to involve M&A only to the extent of context; no theoretical contribution is straightly linked into the model. Instead, with concerns to our research questions, we have chosen to directly link factors mentioned in perspectives on learning, given its more salient relevance. The model is an interpretation of our understanding from reading the literature, with emphasis on learning. The model partly follows Van de Ven’s (1992, p. 170) delineation of “process as explanation of variance theory”. Van de Ven (1992, p. 170) explains the structure of such model as an “input-process-output” type of model, with input as independent variable and output as dependent variable. However, we divert from the original view from Van de Ven’s explanation by adding step four, which directly influence to what extent capabilities has been developed together with routines, and thus works as initial value. Accordingly, including first-time acquirers and experienced acquirers. Therefore, the model somehow elicits a cyclical process, instead of a straight-off duplicate of Van de Ven’s (1992, p. 170) argumentation.
Step one, that is, input, in terms or experience. Once the companies enter post-M&A phase, the experience could first be useful for learning. Theoretical underpinning is provided by e.g. Jang and Daniliuc (2014, p. 8) and Halebian et al. (2006, p. 357). Also, as Barkema and Shijven (2008, p. 612) note, deliberately regarding experience as input is the first step of consciously operate for learning. Conclusively, acquisition experience works as input in the overall effort to create knowledge from it.

Step two, that is, the “black box” of transforming experience from tacit knowledge, resided in each individual, to explicit knowledge learned by the organization’s employees. We position ourselves with the articles by Zollo and Winter (2002) and Kale and Singh (2007). Each component of articulation, codification, sharing and internalizing has been discussed in the theoretical framework as moderators of learning. Therefore, our model adopts the cyclical relationship between all four.

Step three, that is, creation of M&A capabilities (dynamic capability) together with organizational routines for post-M&A integration operations. We underpin step three with conceptualizations from Felin et al. (2012) and Easterby-Smith et al. (2009) and Zollo and Winter (2002). Capabilities and routines are the output after experience has been processed in step two and learning has been drawn from the experience.

Step four, that is, how the output becomes initial value in the subsequent acquisition. Once the routines have been developed, and capabilities evolved, they both become the guidelines. Conclusively, we believe our two research questions could be connected to the overall model, with step two and four in particular. Step two connects to research question one, by undertaking how learnings from experience are drawn. Step four connects to research question, wherein it focuses on how experience is utilized in subsequent deals.
4. Practical methods

In this chapter, we present and argue for our practical procedures. Following chapter reviews for instance how the interviews were conducted, how the interview guide is designed and the aspect of anonymity and confidentiality. Also, we present our chosen analysis method and argue for how the analysis has been conducted and why.

4.1 Research strategy

Saunders et al. (2012, p. 173) argue that a research strategy can be seen as the study’s “plan of action to achieve a goal”. There exist a variety of research strategies, which all build upon different methodological assumptions. For instance, different strategies might be an experiment, survey, case study, longitudinal study or archival research (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 173; Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 53). For this study, we have chosen to proceed with a case study strategy. To establish coherence, the case study strategy is deemed appropriate given our methodological selections. We aim to understand how learnings are drawn from previous experience, with “how” as the focal adverb in the research questions to answer our overall purpose. Welch et al. (2011, p. 747) argue for the relevance of case studies when the study seeks to understand human experience, providing rich and thick descriptions – both essential to creating understanding. Additionally, Thomas (2011, p. 512) accentuates how case studies look deeper at complexities entangled in one single case than do a few variables resided in a larger population of cases or the observed selection. Given (2008, p. 68) compares case studies, often associated with constructivism, with large-N studies, associated with surveys, and argues specifically for the advantage of depth against breadth. Even positivistic researchers, usually skeptical towards “soft” social science, can see the advantages of extracting rich depth in the data of case studies, given its multiple angles (Given, 2008, p. 68).

Practically, our case is a multinational company active in the offshore and marine industry. The company has actively been using acquisitions as strategy for growth over an extended period of time. Given it is only one company, the study adopts a single case study strategy. Nevertheless, there have been several data collection sources within the studied case, with individuals at different organizational levels and a variety of experience. Namely, the different perspectives are pilot interview, interviews and secondary data (manuals, workshop notes, playbooks). Through the different sources, we have been able to fulfill the criteria of thick description, which Welch et al. (2011, p. 748) argue is to strive for. However, we have not been able to make further observations other than having visual contact during the interview sessions. Although, we believe with support from Given (2008, p. 69), that our altered perspectives provide firm ground to conduct analysis upon, despite lack of direct observations.

Cooper and Schindler (2011, p. 181) present one shortcoming of single case studies, which alludes to the shortage of cross-case analysis. The authors suggest multiple cases are needed to provide the study with a possibility to cross-analyze the sample. However, we oppose this postulation with the argument of multiple sources within the same case, thus compensating for the shortage of more cases. Also, with support from Welch et al. (2011, p. 747), our case study provides rich contextual data in which understanding can be developed. We argue that a single case study suits our research purpose and saturates our data collection enough to adequately answer our research questions together with fulfilling our research purpose. Thomas (2011, p. 517) highlights an objection to case
studies not as a strategy, but how it is constructed; it either focuses on the subject, i.e. the studied phenomenon, or the object, i.e. the company itself. The researchers need to take stance what is important in the discussion of subject and object. However, we believe the discourse can be traced back to ontological assumption to the extent of what is essential. If the subject is foremost pivotal, the ontology is assumed objectivistic, and should be treated as such research phenomenon. With cross-analysis and multiple angles to get a grip. A subjective assumption, we argue, does not intend to entangle the subject from its object, in order to clinically evaluate the subject. Therefore, we argue that subject and object is deeply tangled, and that fact needs to be taken into consideration in the analysis.

4.2 Interview method
Two foundations in the way of constructing an interview methodology are commonly found in previous literature as quantitative and qualitative approaches (Magnusson & Marecek, 2012, p. 1-2; Cooper & Schindler, 2011, p. 168; Bryman, 2012, p. 470). Regarding which extend those approaches are emphasised, a different set of rules from a methodological point of view are highlighted (Cooper & Schindler, 2011, p. 168-170). For instance, when quantitative interviews are conducted, authors claim that a more structural form should be applied to collect appropriate data to be coded in the process for further research analysis (Cooper & Schindler, 2011, p. 169; Bryman, 2012, p. 471). Qualitative research and interview methods aim to accomplish quality criteria as validity, reliability and generalization (Cooper & Schindler, 2011, p. 168-169). The interviewers’ challenge is to maintain neutrality throughout the process and gathering data in a standardised manner (Bryman, 2012, p. 470). Contrary, when a qualitative interview method is applied, an interpretive research form of semi-structured or unstructured interviews could be used in the strive to understand a social reality more in-depth (Magnusson & Marecek, 2012, p. 1). Semi-structured and unstructured interviews are said to differ to which degree they provide the researcher flexibility in the dialog between interviewer and respondent (Cooper and Schindler, 2011, p. 169; Bryman, 2012, p. 470). Magnusson and Marecek (2012, p. 47-48) mention open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews to be more conversation-like, in comparison with structured surveys. Further, these authors claim that interpretive qualitative researchers should aim to find meaning with rich and elicit answers, which can be done by applying a method of open-ended questions when the dialog flows from one topic to another (Magnusson & Marecek, 2012, p. 48).

Various researchers claim that a guide could be gainful for navigation in the process of semi-structured interviews (Cooper & Schindler, 2011, p. 172-173; Bryman, 2012, p. 471; Magnusson & Marecek, 2012, p. 47). Moreover, an interview guide consists of pre-constructed questions, with the fact that respondents do not need to answer questions in logical order (Magnusson & Marecek, 2012, p. 47-48). Hence, some authors declare that grounded theory highlights that the interviewer should not bear too many preconceptions that will affect the form of the interview guide (Bryman, 2012, p. 471). Follow-up questions have also been underlined as important when striving for depth in semi-structured interviews in comparison to quantitative interviews (Magnusson and Marecek, 2012, p. 47). Furthermore, both semi-structured and unstructured forms are pointed out as in-depth-interviews, while the interviews should strive for leading the dialog and communicate understanding towards the respondent (Cooper & Schindler, 2011, p. 173). Advantages in the selection of respondents, adjustments of clearness in language usage and appropriate targets in semi-structured interviews have been underlined as vital by
Bryman (2012, p. 471), while more quantitative observations aim to not affect the respondents (Cooper & Schindler, 2011, p. 169). Henceforth, forming a semi-structured interview guide is proposed to firstly form topics from the study’s research question, secondly with interview topics as a framework for interview questions, and lastly revise these guidelines by adopting a pilot interview (Bryman, 2012, p. 474).

4.3 Semi-structured interviews
In our study, we conducted a semi-structured interview method to answer our research questions. We found Saunders et al.’s. (2012, p. 142) interview form appropriate in a practical way for treating our research design of striving for interpretivism and subjective understanding in collection of useful primary data. The semi-structured method provided our interviews with a desired degree of flexibility (Bryman, 2012, p. 469). The answers could be extracted in a conversational manner, which guided the dialog between the respondent and interviewers. Moreover, the gathering of primary data has been recorded and later transcribed and presented in the empirical part before established as a ground for analysis. Five skype interviews were conducted during our investigation, excluding one pilot interview. This interview form through skype video-calls was useful in a sense that time and distance factors could be overcome. Important during the interview was that the respondent felt comfortable and in a good mood of a quiet environment, along with that the technical set-up worked smoothly (Bryman, 2012, p. 497). Our primary data selection was constituted from respondents in top-management positions, whom works and have previous experience with mergers and acquisitions – specifically in post-merger acquisition integration. This has been vital to provide enriched primary data for our research study. Magnusson and Marecek (2012, p. 34) underline that as important in selection of respondents in relation to context, roles, different appropriate titles and choosing the right group of categories.

4.4 Interview guide
We constructed our interview guide (See appendix 2) in a sequential process as mentioned by Bryman (2012, p. 474). As a starting point, we set up an introduction part to inform the respondent about the study and the research questions and purpose we try to uncover. Also, how the interview procedure would go about and the importance anonymity and confidentiality. In the first questions, we tried to gain some assurance about the respondents’ personal information and background along with some general information about the target company and the previous history of their M&A process. Further, we guided the interview through a phase consisting of eight questions more specifically into the post-merger integration phase. With theoretical connections to our literature and cleared purpose of the formed questions. Next part of the interview guide consisted of 13 questions regarding deliberate learning in connection with our theoretical framework with the purpose to get valuable insights for later evaluation. In the last phase, we tried to conclude what had been outlined by the respondent with the opportunity to add some final thoughts and to inform about the validity check of the study that would be made. Throughout this interview guide, we adopted the method of open-ended and follow-up questions to extract more detailed and enriched answers (Magnusson & Marecek, 2012, p. 47-48; Bryman, 2012, p. 471). Before we started the primary data sampling, a pilot-interview were set up to test and improve the interview guide questions. Our study adopts an iterative process, so the pilot interview functioned in the framing of the definitive interview guide. Nonetheless, we have taken a stance from the theory when constructing our interview questions, for we believe they answer our research questions and purpose.
most properly. The interview framework has thus not been heavily modified consequent
to the pilot interview. It has been marginally revised to create understanding and facilitate
for the respondents to more correct comprehend the questions.

4.5 Snowball sampling
Sampling should reflect upon the research purpose and the methodological position (Yin,
2011, p. 93). Qualitative approaches of sampling are mentioned to be convenience,
purpose and snowball sampling (Yin, 2011, p. 93; Bryman, 2012, p. 202). We believe
the latter fitted our research mostly adequately. Quantitative sampling methods strive to
generalize towards a population or larger entity, often through statistic random sampling
(Bryman, 2012, p. 203). Random sampling methods require that respondents be selected
ad hoc, contrary to a qualitative sampling of targeting respondents with carefulness and
that is most convenient and close to hand. Thus, criticisms have been given that collected
data tend to be misguided (Bryman, 2012, p. 202-203). Yin (2011, p. 93) tells that
purposive sampling is emphasized more intentionally to fulfill the research needs.
Participants are gathered in a more deliberate manner, and advantages by this method are
outlined with the opportunity to find respondents with desired characteristics (Yin, 2011,
p. 93; Bryman 2012, p. 201-202). Snowball sampling is also referred by Neuman (2011,
p. 268-269) as chain, network, reputational and respondent-driven sampling. Hence, the
crucial sampling feature of the snowball method is that interview objects are connected
to each other directly or indirect (Neuman, 2011, p. 298; Yin, 2011, p. 93). During the
interviews, information about other potential respondents is enlightened and place the
snowball-effect in motion (Yin, 2011, p. 93). Importantly when applying a snowball-
sampling method is that respondents should enrich the study with relevant data, and that
researchers do not ground their selection of convenience but with a clear purpose

We have chosen to conduct the data for our study by snowball sampling, which we find
appropriate because the method will extract a network of top-managers that we would not
be able to reach otherwise (Neuman, 2011, p. 269; Yin, p. 298). Moreover, this sampling
method contributed to our study, to collect enriched data about a small group.
Concentrated in an M&A context that was relevant to the research (Bryman, 2012, p.
202). Our practical procedure started with one contact person at the studied organization,
which allowed us to, partly, both by convenience and purposive reasons conduct a pilot
interview. Further, the follow-up interview was received during the first pilot-interview,
and that approach was followed in the other five interviews of the respondents’ network
(Yin, 2011, p. 298). Conclusively, the snowball-motion was followed through the study
and provided us with a foundation of reaching our research questions to align with our
quality criteria destined for understanding. In regard to above, our snowball-sampling
could be considered purposive-sampling (Bryman, 2012, p. 201-202). For example, the
fact that we had a deliberate research aim, even though we were unaware of the enriched
data outcomes from the interviews. Finally, this conducted snowball-sampling method
puts the participants centralized in the study, which we believe creates desired relevance
and depth along with the importance of respondent validation (Bryman, 2012, p. 202-
203).
4.6 Ethical considerations

There are several ethical reflections in which actions need to be carefully valued and contemplated. Neuman (2011, p. 143) argues that few ethical givens are agreed upon; instead, principles dictate what considerations need to be reviewed and cared for in social research. Ensuring the participants safety, integrity and to guarantee that no one involved suffers any harm is the ultimate goal of research ethics according to Cooper and Schindler (2011, p. 32). They suggest, as do Neuman (2011, p. 143), that no universal laws for ethics exist, like jurisdictional laws. Every researcher has a different mindset and approach to moral and ethics, which dictates a path for the focal study. Bryman and Bell (2015, p. 134) argue that the bespoke principles fall into four different categories: (1) if the participants are harmed; (2) if there is a lack of consent; (3) if there is a violation of privacy; (4) and if there is intended dishonesty involved. We believe the undertone of ethical considerations resonates with transparency and good intentions. Further, intentionally biasing or tampering with the data collection or should be deemed unethical (Adams et al. 2007, p. 35). Our study strives for transparency within this section, practical method, together with full disclosure of unbiased material in the empirical findings. Thus, we try not to leave out unflattering realities or have been pursued by any external pressure to present tendentious portray of our results intentionally.

Two of our most delicate considerations revolves around confidentiality and anonymity. Collins and Hussey (2009, p. 46) suggest all researchers should engage in offering anonymity and confidentiality to every participating individual and organization. Additionally, Bryman and Bell (2015, p. 136) argue that an increasing commonality amongst researching students is to engage in a non-disclosure deal with the observed organization. Neuman (2011, p. 143) also stresses the fact of actual harm – both economical and personal – that could affect the participants if a violation of trust transpires. In essence, confidentiality – of the given information – and anonymity – of the particular participant and organization – need to be held strictly to create trust and thus transparency in the interviewees’ answers.

We have signed a non-disclosure agreement mentioned above with our researched company. Before conducting the actual interviews, we had already signed the agreement, which in practice enabled us to advance our study given the fact the company made sure we received individuals for our interviews. But also, secondary data in forms of manuals, lesson-learned material and internal figures. However, we have made sure to inform every participant of our study’s aim, the purpose of our research and how research is going to be presented, for the participants to read what they have contributed with easily. Further, in adherence with Collins and Hussey (2009, p. 46) and Punch (2014, p. 43), we have ensured voluntary participation, ensured strict confidentiality, anonymity and transparency to avoid deception. Every participating individual understood the premises and gave their consent before the interviews were conducted. In the case of one respondent, we even sent the question on beforehand on their request. Furthermore, we have ensured the organization and the individuals that nothing presented in our thesis will be able to trace back to them. That was one of their prerequisites and was thus transparent and communicative on every question of our interview guide. Also, we have received sensitive material, in forms of manuals and internal figures, which both were sent after consent about abovementioned ethical issues. Conclusively, we cross-checked our transcriptions with the participants to erase any miss-understandings or false interpretations, which ensures dignity for the participants to not be discredited.
4.7 Pilot interview

Before conducting the actual interviews, authors argue that pilot interviews should be implemented to detect flaws and give an initial indicator if the questions are well-calibrated in connection to the research questions and purpose (Adams et al., 2007, p. 136). Moreover, Adams et al. (2007, p. 136) argue that the pilot interview needs to test: how the questions are worded; how the sequence follows; estimated time frame but also if the sampling is representative. Saunders et al. (2012, p. 451) add to this argument by stating a pilot interview also accounts for a first assessment whether the interview guide achieves the quality criteria. The first interview should indicate if the interview guide will be able to facilitate the envisioned procedure, or if adjustments need to be done (Chenail, 2011, p. 257). Furthermore, Quinlan (2011, p. 273) calls for rigor in the research study, which could be improved by a pilot study, to certifying validity into the questions. Overall, we understand the literature’s metaphor with piloting – the initial interview fulfills the purpose to see if data gathering instrument flies.

We did our pilot interview the 7th of March, together with one of our respondents. We used our initial interview guide in the process to test if the given answers cohered with our envisioned responses in relation to the research questions. The pilot interviewed had a duration time of roughly one hour and twenty minutes. The session was face-to-face; we met with the respondent and was thus able to proceed without stress. We informed the respondent about their participation in the pilot study, to instill increased awareness to notify if some questions were ill-formulated or were not understood. We transcribed the entire interview and reviewed the result afterwards, with regards to Adams et al. (2007, p. 136) exhortation of sequence and flow. During the focal interview, we did not use any notes or computers to write; but let the recording ensure we could focus on the interview guide and therefore guaranteeing no flaws due to time-taking noting. We also debriefed our respondent afterwards for input or adjustments, with support from Kvale and Bringmann (2009, p. 129).

After reviewing the pilot interview, with certain aspects in mind, such as question sequence, wording and flow – we pulled some conclusions. Almost the entire interview guide gave representative answers as envisioned, with concerns about our purpose and research questions. The interview guide had to be revised only by small means, such as rephrasing one word in a question. The overall assessment of our pilot interview confirmed our interview guide was adequately outlaid to accordingly answer our questions with validated answers, also to adhere to our research questions. Therefore, with support from Adams et al. (2007, p. 136), we chose to include our pilot interview in the final sample. This is motivated by the answers we got from the respondent together with no significant changes needed to be done. From our pilot interview, we were able to receive valuable data to an extent comparable to our other interviewees. Also, since the interview was thoroughly worked on beforehand, and that settings were not differing significantly, the pilot interview did not differ enough to motivate exclusion only due to its nature.

4.8 Respondent validation

As an act of honesty and credibility, social researchers accentuate the weight of corresponding the transcribed material to the respondents, to establish a trusted relationship and thus reduce the risk of deceiving perception (Harvey, 2015, p. 26). Respondent validation – also referred to as member checking – is one way of better
calibrating whether the empirical evidence portrays the respondents’ perceived reality or the researchers’ interpretation of gathered data (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell & Walter, 2016, p. 1805). Further, in qualitative research, there have been calls for transparency. Specifically, to transcribe accurately, seek feedback from the respondents and later report ethically and truthfully (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 322). One question that has been raised by authors is whether the collected data should be regarded as something researchers own, or if instead is the belongings of the participants (Birt et al., 2016, p. 1803). Taken abovementioned problematizing into consideration, we came to the conclusion of beneficial transparency. There has been no revision in our transcriptions since no respondent has called for adjusting their first-given version. We sent the interviews back via e-mail, as such way of communication has been promoted throughout the entire study.

We motivate our choices by addressing it the issue same as confidentiality and anonymity; if we had transcribed any sensitive matter – organizational or personal – that could potentially harm the concerned respondent, we would act unethical and therefore violate our jurisdictional agreement. Further, we find backing for our way of conduct by several authors. Torrance (2012, p. 115) argues through an ontological assumption, and asks whether the respondents would have given their subjectively interpreted reality to same extent if they knew sensitive material could harm themselves. Cho and Trent (2006, p. 322) support member checking due to its illuminative nature of representation and credibility, in which we argue, in fairness, that our study seeks to understand the respondents’ interpreted reality epistemologically. Those necessary prerequisites exhort credibility; otherwise we would present our interpretation in larger scale, rather than our respondents’ perception. Harvey (2015, p. 34) underlines the importance of honesty; given our encouragement for our participants to act honestly in the interviews, we argue that is our responsibility to fulfill this commitment and nurture a two-way communication built on trust.

4.9 Secondary data
Case studies can entail a varied set of data sources for researchers according to Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007, p. 28). Additional to interviews, case studies rely upon multiple sources to answer the sought of thick description as our epistemological methodology postulated (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 28). Our philosophical theorizing together with our search for the respondents’ interpretation of their lived reality argues for the employment of multiple sources. Gibbert, Ruigrok and Wicki (2008, p. 1465) argue about case studies’ interrelationship to the nature of the research design, in which they conclude case studies compatibility with explorative studies, as our study does adopt. Their argument is based upon the presumptions that case studies provide multiple contributions to early theory building, in which variables and interrelationships are yet to be explored (Gilbert et al., 2008, p. 1465). Moreover, there are different types of data sources according to Yin (2009, p. 101) in case studies: documentation, archival records, interviews, observations or physical artefacts.

Complementary to interviews, as we have reviewed for above, we have used documentation and archival records. In elaboration, we have used published annual reports as our researched organization have published, with portrayed M&A activity as data. We have used annual reports from 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 – five years tracing back. Further, we have taken part of internal archival records from our researched organization. These archival records materialize through workshop notes, integration
manuscripts (one corporate-level manual and one divisional-level manual, which is labeled as annex to the overarching manual), lesson-learned notes and summarized post-integration lesson-learned notes. In total, we analyzed nine documents that could count as supplementary to the conducted interviews. Neither of the internal material or the annual report have been presented in a way that could jeopardize the confidentiality or anonymity. Therefore, the empirical findings contain our rewriting and interpretation of the material.

In essence, the reason for using a rich variety of data is to achieve triangulation. Neuman (2011, p. 164) defines the phenomenon as to observing an object from a multiple point of view. Following our line of argumentation above regarding relativism and subjectivism, we are aware of the fact we do not try to understand one “object” in its true sense of objectivistic phenomenon. However, given the fact that our interviews work as principal data source, the documentations and archival records plays its role as supplementary triangulation to provide accuracy into our analysis (Darke, Shanks & Broadbent, 1998, p. 286). The process of triangulation enables our analysis to be problematized if the interviews, annual reports and documentation juxtapose. In line with Huberman and Miles’ (2002, p. 14) argumentation, we believe the employment of triangulating data sources works synergetic – it allows the researchers to spot relationships which may have been unseen from a single point of view.

4.10 Analysis method
Thematic analysis of qualitative data could be useful for setting up a framework consisting of categories and familiarized patterns. Some might be indistinguishable from the origin topics of the interview guide and other newly constructed themes (Adams et al., 2007, p. 155). Ghauri and Gronhaug (2010, p. 205) discuss how to interpret data and the researchers’ role in qualitative data analysis. In the strive for interpretation, the observant should take a subjective and intuitive stance to enhance sense making of both manipulated and composed data. Compared to a more quantitative nature of data analysis, when neutrality in the scientists’ interpretation is preferred by means of drawing conclusions from hypotheses and statistical outcome (Creswell, 2014, p. 160-162). Some authors claim that awareness of given time constraints and to retain focus of the study’s research goal as important during research analysis. Hence, same authors also highlighted the fact of being pragmatic and responsive to the data as a qualitative analyst (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 86). Creswell (2014, p. 197-198) presents a process for data analysis in qualitative research. Firstly, by setting a solid ground of preparing the raw data from different types of sources, often by transcribing interviews. Further, by going through all the data before heading into the coding procedure. The outcome from the coding of the data should result in some themes or description that could be used into the two last steps, more aimed to understand interrelations and interpretations of the themes or descriptions. In the final step, Creswell (2014, p. 200) declares that researchers’ personal views could establish an interpretative analysis in qualitative research. Also, in discrepancy of findings in contrast to theories or by confirming and diverge previous literature. This type of analytical method could also arise new unanswered questions that have not been foreseen. In a case study research approach, Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 199) state that focus should be placed on portraying and classify different coding of data to manageable themes or categorization. Thus, to provide an understanding of the case and its context.
In our research analysis, we first started to review the material of transcriptions and the integration manuals of secondary data collected through six semi-structured interviews. From our field notes, we started the coding procedure by listing all of the interesting and co-occurring topics. Initially, these topics from the conducted interviews were up to the sum of 215 different notes (See appendix 2). Further, we ranked and clustered these subjects together as major, unique and leftover topics (See appendix 3) from a proposed method by Creswell (2014, p. 198). From the abbreviation of these topics, we tried to excerpt parts in the transcribed text manually and see if there were topics connected to each other in the coding. More specific, we matched the most prominent major subjects and added the unique and leftover topics (See appendix 3). The secondary data of integration manuals were analyzed and added more additionally in the findings presentation. Based on our assessment about where they could provide additional depth in the empirical part. This enabled the fact that we could present five different themes in the findings part: M&A integration teams, techniques for integration learning, integration strategy, integration planning and environmental learning (See appendix 3).

In line with Creswell (2014, p. 200), we continued with this framework of categories into the analysis from our interpretive method included our theory and chosen theoretical tools (See figure 2). To generate a discussion uncovering similarities and dissimilarities from the findings of our case study. Henceforth from our subjective viewpoint as Corbin and Strauss (2015, p. 86) declares as essential. This is also supported by additional authors to be appropriate in qualitative case study research, to provide a thematic approach for analysis, which in our context surround to the fact that we used the coded categories (Quinlan, 2011, p. 429). Conclusively, we provided meaning of understanding and insights to our collected data as Ghauri and Gronhaug (2010, p. 199-200) suggest. By display and reconstitute selected data for conclusions, which we believe adequate in relation to our qualitative case study research methodology.

4.11 Quality Criteria

The value of evaluating qualitative research is proposed to be estimated by criteria of trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 246-248; Bryman & Bell, 2012, p. 400). This differs in respect of chosen research approach, while literature suggests that quality criteria such as validity and reliability are traditionally utilized in quantitative research (Given, 2008, p. 302). Henceforth, in this part we will emphasise four different criteria for trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, which we found appropriate due to our scientific methodology (Bryman & Bell, 2012, p. 403; Guba, 1981, p. 80; Bryman, Becker & Sempik, 2008, p. 267). In contrast to qualitative research, Guba and Lincoln (1982, p. 246) postulate a justification of the conventional criteria of validity, reliability and objectivity. Trustworthiness will provide value of quality evaluation in our strive for relevance (Guba, 1981, p. 78-80). Therefore, we found the truth criteria’s adequate in relation to our ontological and epistemological methodology.

4.11.1 Credibility

The first criteria applied is credibility. Highlighted in literature as a parallel to internal validity according to Guba (1981, p. 80) in the evaluation of qualitative research. Silverman (2013, p. 306) accentuates that in order to fortify credibility there should be clarity of links between data, the interpretations made by the researchers and the conclusions drawn. Some authors also underline that findings of the social reality should be credible to prove that they are substantial and acceptable (Bryman & Bell, 2012, p. 401). Moreover, Corbin and Strauss (2015, p. 343) mention different procedures for
achieving credibility and illuminates partly the fact of having triangulation, enriched descriptions and participant selection. Due to our research, we have tried to accomplish credibility in our findings by semi-structured interviews and secondary data gathering. Also, using a snowball sampling method for respondent selection and to consent clarity of our interpretations from the empirical analysis.

4.11.2 Transferability
To understand generalizability, the research aim should be clarified (Silverman, 2013, p. 146). While quantitative studies aim for generalization in a more statistical nature and prefer results of breadth instead of in-depth (Bryman & Bell, 2012, p. 402). Guba (1981, p. 86) and Silverman (2013, p. 146) reflect upon the fact that qualitative research can partly accomplish transferability to expand theories and to address social relations rather than generalize populations and individuals. Thus, a case study should strive for expanding theories and maximize the given information about the context. To accomplish a degree of fittingness by substantial descriptions of given conclusions (Guba, 1981, p. 86). Analogous, what Silverman (2013, p. 306) describes as prof for wider inference. We tried to achieve transferability in our case study to provide descriptive circumstances in the extend they could be conceived in order of our applied anonymity criteria. Followed by a clear presentation of methodological reasoning, data collection and presented theoretical framework.

4.11.3 Dependability
Dependability is often outlined as a counterpoint in qualitative research in relation to the term reliability in a more quantitative methodology (Bryman & Bell, 2012, p. 403; Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 247). According to Corbin and Strauss (2015, p. 243) the researchers should take strategic action in the course of the study to ensure reliability in qualitative research. Highlighted partly as keeping methodological coherence, saturation and provide adequate sampling methods both in theory and practically. Guba (1981, p. 86) claims that dependability concerns the stability of data due to consistency and replicability, partly by overlapping methods as triangulation. Henceforth, Bryman and Bell (2012, p. 403) emphasise that dependability in the criteria of trustworthiness and that the researcher should take an auditing stance comprised to keep recording of the phases in the process of research. We have considerate these criteria by having transparency in method selection, multiple sources of data and the interpretations made in findings, discussion and conclusion.

4.11.4 Confirmability
Contrasting confirmability as a form of objectivity has become a recognized truth criterion in qualitative research evaluation (Bryman, Becker & Sempik, 2008, p. 267; Guba, 1981, p. 87). Marshall and Rossman (2006, p. 203-204) claim that confirmability should treat the meaning about how the findings can be confirmed by others from the interpretations constituted. Furthermore, some authors declare that transparency can strengthen research claims and a qualitative approach should concern the subjectivity of the researcher when developing in-depth understanding (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 203). Guba (1981, p. 247) postulates that the interest regarding the quality criteria should be the confirmability of the data. Thus, Marshall and Rossman (2006, p. 203-204) mention different strategies for limiting bias when being an interpretive researcher. Partly as audit trail between data collection and analysis, describing the role of previous literature in analysis and carefulness in handle data and reflect upon possible alternative explanations. We have strived for confirmability by having transparent and supported
methodology between triangulation of data collection and analysis. Moreover, by being aware of our subjective stance and interpretations that will affect the study.
5. Findings
Following chapter present our empirical findings and is presented through the main headings deduced from the analysis. The chapter contains numerous quotations from our respondents and the secondary data, with the purpose of reader’s interpretations of our material.

5.1 Respondent presentation
In order to keep the anonymity and confidentiality jurisdictional unbroken, we cannot name our respondents. We cannot either name their position, which could jeopardize their anonymity. In order to inject validity, we have added their experience of doing M&As and integration work. The experience does entail both for current company and previous experiences. The chart below (see Table 1) narrates general information about the interviews; including dates and time. We have reviewed the essentials regarding our interviews above in the practical method. Both small, medium and large company acquisitions are included in the experience. The respondents have also conducted domestic and international acquisitions. Although our focus is cross-border mergers and acquisitions, this experience influences on their overall perception and could help contrast certain discrepancies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Experience of M&amp;A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Respondent 1</td>
<td>2018-03-07</td>
<td>01:04:11</td>
<td>1–5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Respondent 2</td>
<td>2018-03-21</td>
<td>01:04:39</td>
<td>20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Respondent 3</td>
<td>2018-03-22</td>
<td>01:00:27</td>
<td>1–5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Respondent 4</td>
<td>2018-03-26</td>
<td>01:05:34</td>
<td>20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Respondent 5</td>
<td>2018-04-10</td>
<td>01:03:59</td>
<td>20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Respondent 6</td>
<td>2018-05-02</td>
<td>00:51:36</td>
<td>10-15 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2 M&A Integration Teams
In every conducted acquisition the company has historically done, the integration team plays a central and decisive role. All respondents together with the two manuals accentuate the fact that M&A work is mainly carried out by teams. Lawyers, top-management and external resources, e.g. investment bankers, deal with target screening and selection, then advancing to the due diligence process. Subsequent steps – before signing the deal but after screening – are called preparation phases and include “phase 0” and “Phase I”, according to the integration manuals (Integration Manual I and II, whereas I is the general from here on and II the annex). For stringency and clarity, following phases are: “Phase II” called planning; “Phase III” called transition; “Phase IV” called integration; and “Phase V” called finalized integration. First of all, the project owner, the company’s CEO, assembles a steering committee – in the role as chairman – consistent of people from the acquiring company and the target company. Then, the steering committee and acquisition team creates the high-order integration plan and project charter. In elaboration, the high-order plan embrace vision, high-order budget, scope of integration, synergy estimation and M&A rationales. Later, the steering committee nominates the integration manager, whom then is involved in the final stages of the due
diligence. Finally, after the deal is signed, but before closed (when the money or stock is actually transferred), the integration team is nominated. The process articulated by one respondent as follows:

“In that case, the team we nominate for the integration; me as integration manager, I was onboard early, during the due diligence. After the signing, and before the closing, we nominate the teams, consisting of people from both companies. Those teams continued after the closing and the merger, so there was actually contingency in the members in those teams. I think it’s very important you don’t have one team working with the pre-closing issues and then you hand over it to another team after the closing. Pre-team, preparing for the integration before closing date, after you signed, can prepare something and then we nominate a team and those team continue after the closing date with integration and preparing it to hand over to the businesses” (R3)

There is an agreed conception regarding the dynamics within the integration team. It needs to entail individuals from both sides of the M&A, not only people resided in the acquiring part. One respondent exemplifies the underlying rationales for this approach:

“We always try to populate equally from the company that been acquired. Psychologically, that is a very good approach, and very balanced approach that you give the impression and the feeling, to the acquired company, that ‘Hey, this is, hopefully, like a merger of equals. In a way that we treat you equally and let’s do the integration equally’. That’s always the aim” (R5).

Following statement is also underlined in both integration manuals as guideline when assembling the team, and featured in interviews with respondent 2, 3 and 4. The teams should consist of 3-7 individuals totally, with the ultimate aim of having equal participation from both organizations. All of our respondents mention that every integration team, for every new acquisition, is compounded from scratch when facing the challenge. The reason for this strategical approach lies in functional knowledge and integration scope. For instance, if the company acquires a certain company, which operates in a certain field of area, respective business unit’s personnel are regarded as most suitable to integrate that company’s different business branches, suggest respondent 1, 3 and 6. Accordingly, if the company acquires an industrial company, the most suitable people in-house will handle the integration. If the company acquires a business operating system company, different people – with required knowledge – will thus handle that integration.

Mobility of members in the integration team will probably occur, whereas a range of respondents claim that it is commonly happening before moving on to next acquisition deal (R3, R4 & R5). Submitted in the interview gathering, respondent 1 and 6 declared that team work and group performance are partly achieved by sustaining commitment of the integration team and a leader with prominent skills of delegation. According to respondent 5 and 6, often when the integration work is done, the M&A team and the integration team are going back to their former roles in the company and daily operations. In the studied company, one full-time employee is mentioned as a M&A resource (R4 & R5). Further, respondent 5 mentions that the other resources in the integration team is partly working with their ordinary business, in combination with the integration tasks.
Frequent utilization of some people could be possible along the M&A process. Albeit to a minor extent in the firm’s acquisition history. Most commonly, responsible people and group formation in one M&A transaction is replaced in the subsequent acquisition, explained below:

However, five of our six respondents acknowledge the weaknesses of having newly formed teams for every acquisition. All five express their vision of having somewhat permanent resources involved in the entire process chain when undergoing acquisitions and emphasis on integration phase. Up until now, the company hasn’t been able to have a constant flow of acquisitions in their pipeline. Instead, they have been infrequent, as respondent 2 express it:

“I don’t know if it’s coincidence, but they have come in pairs in a two or three years interval almost” (R2).

The fact of having no real contingency, or “critical mass of project”, as respondent 4 labeled it, has been the single-most contributing factor to not be able justifying having a full-time resource for acquisitions. Therefore, to this point in time, the ambition of having one full-time resources involved in the entire process, in every acquisition, is just ambitions and not reality. Nevertheless, on corporate level, there is a HR-employee involved in every acquisition making sure the employee contracts are properly transferred and jurisdictionally appropriate. Conclusively, one respondent summarizes the current situation and future vision as follows:

“Well I think the best way is really to have the same people working on the new cases as well. It’s a bit tricky since Company X have three quite independent business areas, and then when there’s an integration project, it’s mostly the responsibility of that specific business area. Like Company Y for instance, they wouldn’t necessarily have someone from Company Z coming in to join their integration processes” (R4).

Moreover, the issue of experience portrays through the discrepancy between the integration manuals and the respondents’ illustration of how the integration team’s composition is shaped. Given the future vision outlaid above, regarding permanent resources, the integration manuals promote experience of integration, or experience of project integration, as prerequisite to be a part of the integration team. At the moment, unit experience and specialized knowledge – e.g. unit-unique off-shore knowledge – is preferred when assembling the team. For instance, when the company has bought another firm, the target company’s core business has been in focus when proportionately assembling an integration team with most knowledge in the specific area. Not necessarily with any integration experience, which our respondents suggest. According to the integration manuals’ recommendations when putting together the team, experience from previous integrations should be accounted for and regarded:

“Best results are achievable when experienced team members are used. Especially in the case of support functions, it is recommended to use team members that have previous experience of integration projects. This way the integration knowledge will accumulate, and company X's integration performance will improve over time” (Integration manual I).
Looking further into what the integrations team’s tasks are, we see that it works almost exclusively as a traditional project team. The integration manuals demonstrate how the different phases have different activities tied to them, which is to be carried out by the integration team within the predetermined time-frame. To illustrate an example, the manuals disclose proposed key activities in “Phase III – transition”: (1) Conduct post-close business review; (2) Manage identified critical activities; (3) Capture and track quick synergies; (4) Execute change management plans; (5) Develop the long-term integration plan. For clarity, the integration manuals exhort the integrations team to tailor the overarching plans and transform them into measurable, detailed plans. It is the responsibility of the integration manager to translate the steering committee’s vision into actual, workable plans, which can be followed-up weekly, monthly and quarterly.

Moreover, respondent 2, 3, 5 and 6 emphasize the integrations team’s – and to some extent the integration management office, headed by the project owner – need for unison and aligned communication plan. They all agree upon the importance of clear communication in the stage of transition. Too often, the communication is ambiguous and happening on too many fronts, to both target company employees but also acquiring company’s employees. This creates uncertainty, anxiety and stress within the organization, affecting the working climate and performance of all employees. Questions like “What will happen to me? Will I work here in the future?” appear and discomfort spreads around the working place, suggests respondent 5. The respondent continues by saying that communication of bad and good news needs to be handled fast and delivered with honesty and clarity as lead words. Respondent 5 underlines that people want to “get back to business as usually – the faster you are able to convey that message, the better”. Furthermore, when it comes to communication, the prominence of simplicity is accentuated. Preferably, only one or two fronts should be used for communication in order to avoid misinterpretations. Unfortunately, according to respondent 2, the reality shapes differently, which means the eager of communication on multiple fronts becomes contra-productive instead of beneficial.

“Communication is always tricky. One aspect I’ve mentioned quite a bit already is to communicate to the target company about the plans et cetera. But also, the communication within the team, that can be tricky as well. Now, we are actually at the moment, it’s a little bit painful a thing, but, in this X acquisition, [...] I feel that we’re talking on too many fronts with the seller – post signing. In effort to get to closing” (R2).

In line with above contention regarding communication simplicity, the integration manuals particularly emphasize the weight of “over-communication”, in the introducing section of the document. In both manuals is the appeal delineated as “you should assume that you will have to communicate everything five times or more. Poor communication is the most commonly cited pain point of most integrations” (Integration Manual I & Integration Manual II). There are multiple headings in both manuals that discuss and guide how communication plans are created. For instance, how the communication strategy should be, which time-aspect to take into consideration when communicating and templates for communication material. However, another aspect of difficulty when communicating with the counterpart’s employees is geographical and cultural aspect. When talking about communicating messages and visions, respondent 3 highlights that culture and geographical location plays a role “if you buy a company with the same background, in Scandinavia, also if you buy a Norwegian company or Swedish company
or Finnish company or German company, and then if you add on Asian culture like China, Korea or Japan, of course it’s a huge difference how you can treat people and tell messages, how open and honest they are” (R3).

Another interesting aspect in the integration team is the deployment of a so-called “clean team” or “clean room”. Basically, this designated team is composed by external resources that without the involvement of the company’s people conduct a due diligence of sensitive material, e.g. customer registration, price lists, business intelligence. In the first phase, only these external resources have access to this material in order to compile a recommendation for the acquisition team – either it is green-lighted or recommended not to proceed. Later, if the company decides to proceed with the target company, an additional clean room and clean team is installed. This time, the majority of participating individuals is still external resources, but one resource from the acquiring company is engaged in the clean room, with access to target company’s business secrets. The time-period is between signing and closing, with decision from the anti-trust and competition authorities yet to be approved.

“That is a common set up that you have a clean team, and if you think about it from a selling company point of view, you collect all the material, usually this is done by legal. You collect all the material and you have two general rooms, one data room and then you have this clean room where you put all the really, really sensitive stuff” (R1).

Moreover, by this stage, the internal resource needs to sign a deal with both companies that if the authorities deny permission to proceed – the resource is instantly excluded from the company, not only the specific acquisition. In essence, the clean team is signing off their own metaphorical suicide mission, if the deal fails. Respondent 1 continues and explains it as such:

“If the deal isn’t closed due to competition law, well, the acceptance from all different countries that has been filed, if that is not accepted, then these people are excluded from the organization.” (R1).

Henceforth, respondent 5 and 6 state that temporary M&A teams is not optimal in regard of the integration learning process. The interviewees add that more dedicated teams and permanent M&A resources should be preferred. Consequently, this could establish better knowledge preservation as a result of the same team involved in numerous acquisitions. Unfortunately, this is not the case when M&A’s are seasonal and not always ongoing cases.

“People have been a part of the integration, and responsible for the integration and this case might not be any more, in the following case. Of course, this is challenging for the organization. Is the company able to build a model that, disregard of the people changes, you are able to retain and maintain the expertise in this area” (R5).

Thus, this might be the fact in the future if a more intense and constant pipeline of M&A cases is a reality. Further, respondent 5 tells that the organization is always changing rapidly, which is challenging. Systematic work, along with having an integration procedure, endures the fact of managing knowledge. In excess of that, the way the studied
organization is doing M&A integration rendered in good templates, documentation and models facilitated the knowledge preservation according to respondent 5. Conclusively, previous respondent also claim that the firm has been lucky in developing some tools that have eased the integration process for people and teams involved.

Moreover, respondent 3 tells that the key for integration is to have an appointed team and the integration manager early involved, already in the due-diligence process. The same interviewee tells that integration can depend on the type of synergies that the organization tries to accomplish. While others point out that planning and implementation work should be understanding what the value drivers are for the transaction and then designing the organisation and the integration level based on that (R4). Further, same respondent claims that independence of the acquired entity could be an option if the potential issues to arise are to vital, affectively the group of people will remain undisturbed and daily operations can continue as usually.

5.3 Techniques for integration learning

One of the most central activities the company has organizationally commenced is the integration manual. Namely, as mentioned, we have retrieved two integration manuals, however, one is labeled as the principal manual, whilst one is specifically generated as annex to the principal manual, based on that time’s two acquisitions. The integration manuals were first created in 2014, following two sizeable equal acquisitions at that time, according to respondent 2. The principal integration manual’s purpose is to foremost work as a tool, or a “platform”, as is described in the preface. The purpose is not to work as policy, nor as guaranteed road-map to successful integration. Hence, the manual is designed to support integration managers, integration teams and integration offices to assist with templates and proposed way-of-conducts. Respondent 3 verbalizes about the manual as follows:

“We spent a lot of time with this integration, we wrote an integration manual on 30-40 pages and there’s probably 50 different appendixes for different functions and different streams in the future. I would say, by that, we now have an integration manual, which could be used for the next integration. I know it’s used for the acquisitions we have done now recently. We used these lessons learned and try to use it for the future as well” (R3).

The creation of named manuals is the spawn of professionalism, imply respondent 2, 4 and 5. In striving to become more serious, and institutionalize a culture of acquisition, this activity was an important step. As discussed above, the documents contain step-by-step guidance from preparation to finalized integration; with templates, instructions and recommendations for each respective step. However, one respondent suggests that integration manuals in general – presumably also internal documents – focus too much on low-hanging fruit. Thus, tend to neglect high-order rationales and underlying purposes for doing the focal acquisition:

“I guess, well, there’s various sorts of manuals and checklists that what need to be done as I mentioned earlier. Those are often times focusing too much on these easy enablers, like IT and finance and not so much on strategy and synergies which are behind the actual acquisition” (R4).
Nevertheless, the manuals expressively tell the main objectives early and stresses the supreme purpose of the documents’ existents by stating: “[…] Integrating acquired businesses to the rest of Company X and facilitating the realization of business synergies over time” (Integration Manual I).

Moreover, even though the integration manual has been in use since 2014, when it first was created, it has not been revised or changed since. Understandably, it has not been prevailing given the scarce M&A activity after the two take-overs that were pressing at the time. According to the parent company’s annual reports, only one acquisition has taken place since the deals struck in 2013, in which integration has been transpiring (Annual report, 2013-2017). The two integrations in progress right now are not accounted for. Consequently, the manuals have been used in three acquisitions subsequent to materialization. Noteworthy, the integrations conducted in 2013-2014 is to be considered as unsuccessful, according to all respondents. Business-environmental disruption is to blame for most of the failed achievements, suggests all respondents. Particularly, one respondent expresses the fact as follow:

“We prepared it well to hand it over to the business to do the final integration, but then the market for us collapsed in all areas. Implying that restructuring activities focusing for whole company X and divisions were put together and merging divisions, so we probably lost focus on the actual integration” (R3).

The learning process lies to some extent in the deployment of the manual, in which the integrations team gets to read into the due diligence material. Also, the tangible learnings occur in the end-stage of each integration, wherein the lesson-learned meetings take place and emerge through sharing. In regards of measurement, facilitating to keep track of progress or stagnation and thus enabling evaluation and learning, there are different techniques the company deploys. Respondent 1 is not familiar with any meticulous evaluation process, more than unprompted meetings. Respondent 2 mentions a variety of techniques; with numerical follow-up of the focal integration compared to forecasted business case, interviews with employees of both companies and internal workshops. Respondent 3 mentions feedback sessions and templates within the integration manual. Respondent 4 argues for financial metrics, saying that soft issues are measured through management’s subjective opinion, whom expresses as follows:

“When we have had these kinds of review – success or failure – in past cases, mostly looking at the financial performance, it boils down to net sales and then profitability.” (R4).

Respondent 5 mentions closing analysis and models for follow-up achievements. Hence, one respondent mentions the problem of measuring objectively, given the dynamic landscape in which the company dwells within. Discussing the general picture of classifying an acquisition as failed or successful, the respondent articulates:

“Then, we’re not living in a world that is very stable, so typically in our acquisitions as well, the situation, well I mean the environment we live in, the market, that may change quite rapidly as well. And in that kind of changing environment, it may actually be hard to measure objectively how it actually went” (R2).
Moreover, the integration manuals provide various measurement templates for each respective phase, but also respective function: integration team, integration manager, synergy stream, functional stream (Integration manual I). It is advocated in the integration manuals that measurements are not static and generalizable, but instead tailored to what kind of acquisition is taking place. For instance, if there is a smaller service company being acquired, that integration may require a different set of measurement tools in comparison to larger, industrial company transactions, in which the size may be equal to acquiring entity. Hence, the integration manuals only provide recommendations, as their pronounced purpose states. In that question, the integration responsible decide upon which strategy to utilize in focal acquisition. Respondent 2, whom has been involved in over ten acquisitions for the company, give one perspective about measurement and evaluation process:

“Well, typically, there is a business case done prior to the acquisition, so of course there is some measurements being formed at that time, to tell you about what the plan is and what time frame are you supposed to extract synergies, what time frame you’re supposed to get the sales up, across-sales up et cetera. Those kinds of measurable things are of course one thing. Then you can of course interview the people that are in the acquired company, you typically have these kinds of questionnaires about how well they understand how this was done, what is the strategy, what is the purpose of this taking place” (R2).

Another aspect figuring in the integration manuals, interviews and relevant documents is lessons learned. We have retrieved two documents of lessons learned from the mergers in 2013/2014, which materializes as PowerPoint-documents. One lesson learned is about one acquisition particularly, whereas the other is of the acquisition year in total – including both deals at the time. Taking stance from the integration manuals, lesson learned is mentioned as main activity when discussing the key issues and purpose of the manuals in general. Further, lessons learned is specifically mentioned as one of the responsibilities ascribed to the integration management office, which function is to support the integration management and team. Also, lesson learned activity is mentioned as key activity in phase IV, as output, thus when the integration is over, and the business supersedes. Looking further into the actual lesson-learned documents, there are some similarities and differences. First, the documents are three-pages long and relies on what has been “good” and what has been “bad” (Lesson Learned I), and also “What went well” and “Even better if” (Lesson Learned II). Respondent 3 develops about the process:

“We did this lesson learned, we had a workshop there with key stakeholders in the integration from both sides of the companies. So, we had a lesson learned day where we highlighted what has been good, what could be better if we did like this” (R3).

Reading into document one, the particular lesson-learned, there are five bullet points in positive aspects of the integration: (1) Positive due diligence process, especially involving integration manager early; (2) Integrations teams, synergy streams managers and functional managers; (3) Synergy focus; (4) Good support from external consultants, and; (5) Team members and meetings. Interestingly, the general lesson learned conducted, subsequent to named one, also involving the other acquisition, is identical regarding content. Instead of five bullet points, there are four bullet points with compressed text of
On the contrary, to the negative aspects, both documents are relying upon six bullet points, which appear in different order but carries the same underlying message, despite the slight variance in text. The slide rendered in following take-away: (1) Lack of resources; (2) Division of responsibility; (3) Defined way-of-doing, the “company X way of doing”; (4) Clear road-map to integration; (5) Top management support, and; (6) Earlier nomination of Target Operating Model-group. During the interview sessions, especially integration teams, synergy focus, and lack of clear way-of-conduct were highlighted by respondent 2, 3 and 4. Also, lessons learned in that time period had been utilized in the two most recent acquisitions, suggests respondent 2. Particularly, the case of resourcing properly and road-map was improved:

“I think that there’s again an increased knowledge and understanding in the organization about the difficulties of doing a proper integration. The two most recent cases – Company Z and the other – has been manned properly and sufficient resources to look at the integration of that one and I think that we have good plans for that one and sort of bulk-on integration” (R2).

The role of meetings as technique for integration learning was brought up and reflected upon in several interviews (R1, R2 & R3). Respondent 1 mentions meetings in the sense that they are used as a tool for evaluation in the integration process. Moreover, the outcome from our interviews showed that standard checklist and due diligence lists are used. Even though the respondents attitude for its usability vary, standardizations of checklists are central in these meetings are significantly dependent on the specific firm and branch to be handling accurate issues. The content of the meetings regarding the M&A integration process also differs in which functions are involved, according to some interviewees (R1 & R3). For example, the legal function is gathered and going through a solid agenda of learnings, but respondent 1 believes that it is quite hard to write down the learnings you have had individually.

"Because those learnings are maybe relevant only for that case and for all of the case. Or maybe some of the cases” (R1).

It is uncertain if learnings in different areas will be applicable again. Meetings occur along the M&A process frequently but are more focused on how to proceed forward than previous learning according to respondent 1. Thus, from what respondent 1 tells about their notion about meetings, central topics are often to share information, delegate and catch-up timely to be on schedule. Even if one interviewee underlines the fact that meetings are time-consuming and cause frustration (R4). However, meetings had not only been brought up to surface as a technique for internal integration learning, but to ease the communication between the acquirer and the target firm. Respondent 2 emphasizes:

And now in the case of X, the X acquisition, that was a bigger one. There we actually had a hand-over meeting that went for a couple of days. Where the deal team actually tried to convey all of learnings and observations about the company to the integration team. So, that was one way of, sort of, ascertain that all findings and observation will be conveyed to the integration team” (R2).
According to respondent 2, the acquisitions happen so infrequently that it is hard to have any established routines how to communicate the learning. Yet, respondent 2 points out that the organization is working in the right direction. For example, the firm had workshop meetings after the series of acquisitions a couple of year ago – to pause and reflect over what went well. Thus, the finding from those workshops could be passed on to next cases. Respondent 3 declares that workshops have been a way of uncovering information on what to improve, what to not improve and compose that into the integration manual. All this have later been transferred to the new team shouldering the integration work forward. Respondent 4 and 6 tell that learning is shared by having experienced people working in the M&A integration projects. Involving them and have the company arrange workshops and seminars where their previous experience is shared. This is emphasized as one way of sharing learnings, along with other techniques.

“We have done the lessons learned workshop, on what to improve and not. We have used integration manuals and all this experience are transferred into the new teams now, who is taking on the existing integration work” (R2).

In essence, previous example of sharing experiences, were workshops partly enlighten as good for evaluation by several respondents (R2, R3 & R4). Additionally, respondent 4 mentions internal integration experts and external consultants, which have been onboard on a several integration projects in the company’s M&A integration history. Thus, in aspects to support the post-merger integration team. Respondent 2, 3 and 4 underlines that workshops held by those consultants and expert was the major helping factor. According to two interviewees, they believe it is really important to have that kind of support, even if the consultants and experts might not be full-time on integration (R4 & R3). Furthermore, respondent 3 and 4 perceive the support is useful for problem-solving and discussion, especially in the planning phase for reaching prosperity. Almost all cases in the integration starts with planning workshops for all the team-members to get everybody together. Respondent 3 insists on that there should always be someone facilitating the workshops to transfer concrete previous experience.

“Then there’s a lot of help if there’s an internal expert who has worked on a multiple integration projects. That’s from my experience the biggest factor for helping. Well, all kinds of external resources also; workshops by these people, to get started, even if a consultant for example will not be used for the project full-time ongoing. Often, they can be used for sparring and solving problems – at least in the beginning, which is most critical for planning to be successful. […] “There should always be someone facilitating the workshops, for example external consultants or internal integration experts or anyone who has hands-on experience from integration projects” (R4).

To summarize, the techniques for learning are both integrations manuals; the general and the annex to the acquisition in 2014. The manuals also consist of templates for evaluation and analysis, which are deployed. Further, lesson learned sessions are set up at the end on an integration. Lastly, workshops are techniques to disseminate knowledge.
5.4 Integration strategy

The utmost important buzz-word, or even notion of concept, is according to both integration manuals and our respondents the word “synergy”. Following the two acquisitions in 2013/2014, where synergy-focus first was introduced and pin-pointed, the focus has only grown narrower, dominating the strategy that acquisition adopts. All of our respondent mentions synergies in almost all answers: synergies in the screening phase, synergies in the due diligence, synergy realization in the transaction part and synergies in the integration phase. Together with this, the integration manuals are built on the foundation of realizing the planned extraction of synergies between target company and acquiring entity. Not least since the synergy work streams are prioritized in the integration manual, having functional streams (e.g. HR, sales, legal) supporting each synergy stream. The synergies fall into two categorizations, according to the integration manuals, which are: (1) cost-savings, and; (2) revenue enhancement. The first category speaks for itself a bit louder than do second category, in which revenue enhancement requires creativity and dedicated work. Cost-savings basically implies removing overlapping employments, whereas revenue enhancement could need more people working together in order for synergies to be realized from having two entities rather than one. Respondent 4 discusses the core definition of this view upon synergies:

“For instance, if you see a lot of cross-selling opportunities, e.g. us acquiring a company, let’s say in a different geography than we currently operate in, we might be able to sell other products via sales channels of that company. And in that case, we don’t have any other alternative really than to integrate those two sales channels and organizations together, to reap out those synergies” (R4).

Looking at the integrations isolated, synergy realization is the sole mission for integrating companies after the acquisitions in 2013-2014, according to both integration manuals, which both state that value creation exists “often due to the synergy potential we see between the acquired business and our existing businesses”. However, further definition of synergy is never presented in the integration manuals. Synergies are either implicitly understood, or so frequently used terminology that no further considerations are endeavored. During our interviews, nothing more initiated than the quote about synergies in practice is delineated or brought up as example. Moreover, according to the integration manuals, synergy realization is divided into six main tasks, excluding the illustrating model in which the process starts from business case and ends with ongoing tracking. Starting with the model, these stages are: (1) Business case and due diligence – here, synergy valuation is estimated and assumptions validated; (2) Initial synergy assessment – baseline established and assumptions are documented; (3) Synergy project development – projects to capture synergies are planned and risk mitigation is planned; (4) Validation and commitment – prioritizing synergy projects and synergy road-map is established; (5) Tracking and reporting – synergies are tracked and reports are developed, and; (6) Ongoing synergy tracking. Additional to this model, which illustrates how synergies should somehow be managed, are six stages that includes templates to manage the process: (1) Synergy evaluation approach; (2) Synergy overview; (3) Key Performance Indicators; (4) Synergy tracking process; (5) Synergy tracking tool; (6) Reporting templates. Conclusively, the focus on synergies and the planning of handling these throughout the entire process is rigorous and prudent in a deliberate way. Additional to this, the lesson learned completed soon after the acquisitions highlight the positive aspects of synergy realization. Albeit the general fallout was not estimated as positive or
successful. Conclusively, this matter has shown great importance by all respondents and manuals, whereas it should be highlighted not only as motivator for doing the acquisition but also driver in the integration.

The underlying strategies that will lead to desired synergies have been elaborated on in several questions, from all interviews except the forth. The strategy is much about what characteristics the targeted firm possess and how they will match the intended vision according to respondents 3, 5 and 6. Moreover, while previous M&A’s are discussed, some acquisitions have been applying a product strategy that adds new products and extend the customer range. For example, respondent 3 means that in some acquisitions, managerial decisions must be made about what brands, products and opportunities that will be kept in the new entity. In the case of former M&As, current products have been mixed with new and added to the portfolios. Mostly, the company ambition is to merge new entities under same roof. One stressed factor by respondent 5 is the question about the ownership; should the new transaction be continuously independent or integrated:

“Of course, looking at the content, there is a bit difference if we are keeping. I mean: Yes, there is a totally different ball-game, if we keep it as a separate entity, then the actually merger doesn’t happen at all. So, basically the company is going more or less as it was before, so then we can see that okay. It might be positive elements that we are able to cross-sell products and boost the business. But there is much less possibility to influence positively and cutting actions for that acquired company because of their independence. The upside is benefitting synergies when we merge it fully, then of course we get a wider toolbox for the merger and the opportunities. But I would say that we also having a bigger toolbox for screwing up things as well” (R5).

In the acquisitions conducted by the company, learning-by-doing cannot be denoted as an explicit, deliberate strategy that has been articulated by the management to integration participants. Instead, understanding respondents 1, 2 and 5, the strategy has resulted in this kind of learning since new members has been filling the teams in every unique acquisition. Two respondents talk about the weight of having integration experience per se, whereas one other respondent talks about not being questioned about their job by subsequent integration teams (R3 & R4). We see from our respondents that learning-by-doing is no critically evaluated strategy, but instead perfunctory. The respondents also highlight the lengthy period of time as contributing factors to the overall learning, since the integration project itself can easily span one year, although the 100 days have passed, as mentioned earlier. Therefore, the respondents see it more as learning along the way. We perceive it from all the respondents’ answers that the time-period affects the learning, and during the process transforms it to learning-by-doing. Furthermore, one respondent adds about the frequency as variable to the lengthy time-period of integrations. Accordingly, if there would have been a constant flow of acquisitions in the pipeline, wherein there is always one integration on-going, the learnings would be easier to schedule and plan for. Now, when the occurrence is occasional, it is harder to actually plan for deliberate learning efforts – more initiated then perfunctory learning. One of the respondents expresses as following regarding the topic:

“If you talk about integration learning process itself it is not optimal, we don’t have like a dedicated, dedicated permanent integration resources,
and I think that is simply a matter of fact in leading organization. M&A things are a bit seasonal. It doesn’t happen so frequently. So, it is difficult to have a permanent integration resource because then we will not be having an integration ongoing there is nothing to do. If we would be having a constantly, maybe that is the future, now we want to intensify this one, with having a constant pipeline of M&A cases on-going, that could be. But in the past, we have not been in that position, it is always build for the purpose basically” (R5).

In regards of successful post-integration outcome, respondent 2 tells that the degree of integration has been considerably low in comparison to less successful integrations where involvement has been present to a wider extent. Hence, several M&A integrations along the firm’s history have been emphasized as more or less a failure according to respondent 2. Highlighted examples of failure through erosion of value in teams and competence along with cultural clashes. Most commonly, full absorption of the target company is the strategy used. Yet, when hands-off strategy has prevailed, it has been due to incompetence about the target company’s core business. The degree of post-merger integration involvement is enlightened to depend on the acquirer and the targeted firm’s interest. For instance:

“I think we got a fairly clear signal for the target company that they didn’t want to be integrated. So that was one reason, and then also their brand was such that, or their company was such that, they were actually selling their products to our competitors as well. So, we didn’t want to touch that from that angel either” (R2).

To summarize, the heaviest emphasize in the strategy is placed upon synergies. Both how synergies a re planned for and realized. Also, the “learning-by-doing” mentality is rather perfunctory, with no deliberate strategy during the integration. Lastly, the strategy of full-absorption is most commonly utilized.

5.5 Integration planning
Similar for every unique acquisition is the planning and thus business case plan and target operational model plan. All of our respondents, together with the manuals, argue for the magnitude of proper planning before engaging in any kind of integration work. Respondent 2 highlights the importance by stating: “Simply, proper execution of the exercise; corporate planning and then executing what you have planned is the key”. As mention above, before the integrations initiates, the steering committee agrees upon a high-order project charter. This involves the strategical rationales and supreme milestones for the integration team to later dismantle and transform into a tangible plan. Further, the plan also decides when the integration is considered as “finalized”. Respondent 1 expresses following words on the question when the integration is over: “I think more or less, you consider it when you have followed the plan”. One development in the planning process has been to shift focus to synergy extraction, which is accentuated by respondents 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. Further, the high-order plan needs to entail why the acquisitions is made, how the integration should proceed, and what the company needs to do, according to respondent 4. Historically, companies tend to forget the core “why” and thus enter a kind of haze. Even though the planning is there, since unexpected events need to be solved with a purpose as baseline. Business case and synergy case is according to all our
respondents the founding pillars in the planning process, whereas one respondent elaborates:

“Typically, when we make business cases about our acquisitions, we pay attention to is the actual financials the figures of the company. And then also tries to make the synergy case work, try to get the benefits out of combining the functionalities, and get the synergies out” (R2)

One enlarged view during the interviews is the concern of customer demands. Respondent 6 highlights the client’s stakeholders in the M&A process. The market might not accept the merger if it is not carried out properly. For example, in one acquisition, the customers were concerned that the consequences would fall out negatively. Especially in one case when there were a few vendors on the market, and then after the merger would disruption transpire. Therefore, the respondent points to the fact that the integration outcome for customers also needs to be calculated in the planning for the acquiring organization. As reflected below:

“If it’s not done well – you are struggling. Then the market may not even accept it, because they say: ‘Yes, you bought it, but it still looks like two different companies’. And that’s also important, that the customers’ expectations of the merger are meet. Customers will not think: ‘Okay, the new company will earn more money the one before’. The customer wonders: ‘What’s in it for me?’ That is also something you need to check. Are the customers happy with it? Are the majority of our customers happy with it?” (R6).

Moreover, the planning process is also a result of experiential learning, according to respondent 1. They suggest that the planning becomes more accurate, more realistic and further developed due to enhanced experience by expressing themselves as such:

“I think from a legal perspective you just know more. And then you maybe, you plan it better. You know what to take into account and that you are not that optimistic in the time schedule and you know which part take time” (R1).

During the entire acquisition process – connecting back to measurement – is the business case benchmark for progress and ultimately success. Regarding the synergy streams, specifically appointed managers (usually members in the integration team) are responsible for extracting the identified synergies from before and deliver on the realization of these. However, respondent 4 elaborates that synergies, as well as business case, are followed-up numerically and evaluated during the integration work. All though integration usually aims at being finalized in ideally 100 days, according to respondent 4 – the synergies may need 2-3 years to actually be realized across the organizations, infers respondent 2. This mismatch in planning and reality may cause bewilderment when cross-matching the actual progression to planned business case, in which the time-frame is preset and decided. Further, the 100 days vary, according to respondent 4 and 6, given if there needs to be rationalization in the production. Then, more than 100 days are needed. Lastly, respondent 2 highlights what they were taught by external resources from a reputable M&A consultancy firm:
'They said that they always make sure they have an empowered experienced integration manager in place, and that they, the project itself almost never last less than two years, so they really make sure that it’s properly followed up’’ (R2).

Continuing on the timeframe, one of the planning process most central issues is how long every phase should be in in aspects of time. Essentially, the time aspect is present in each different phase; due diligence, integration and then later more permanent through the hand-over to the business. Additionally, as mentioned above, the time-frame varies regarding anti-trust and competition authorities’ decision whether the deal is sanctioned or not. This is accentuated by respondent 1, whom verbalizes that “you also have this from a compliance perspective. You also have a deadline of pressure to find those rotten eggs, the problems in the company”. Parallel to this, the company has a mind-set of accomplishing the integration in 100 days – even though it’s not articulated, according to respondents 1, 4 and 5. Respondent 5 articulates it as such: “And I guess some kind of mantra is that 100 days after the closing”. After the 100 days are finished, the subsequent integration efforts turn into sub-projects. Here, integration work is in the twilight zone of being integration related as to the focal acquisition or progressing work to streamline the businesses and extract synergies. Subsequently, the integration project per se abruptly ends after the unspoken 100 days. Focus is turned into ordinary business, even though some parts would be needing continuous efforts.

Milestones, both in regards of cornerstones in planning but also as gate-keepers, have various focus in the planning process contra reality. First, the integration manuals place relatively heavy emphasis upon milestones and the arrangement of such concerning the initial plans. Pursuant to both integration manuals, milestones should be set in the preparation phase and hence accomplished along the actual integration phase. More precisely, managed under the heading by functional stream managers, synergy stream managers, change management and communication accountable. The general integration manual suggests following about milestones: “The integration process is preferably visualized and communicated based on the phases, milestones and links to the main M&A process”. However, on the contrary, the respondents were not familiar with the terminology in the aspect of having certain achievement headlined as milestones. Instead, they discuss different financial metrics, synergies and functional stream checklists (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5 & R6). Hence, there is a discrepancy between the manuals and respondents’ perception of milestones as terminology. Respondent 5 elaborates and outlines the work with milestones in forms of gate-keepers – certain achievements needed to be fulfilled in order for the process to proceed:

“I would say kind of model, and checklist, on how we do M&A. Part of this process is that we have a certain gate approval. I would say gates when we are getting and asking the approval for the case and each time when we are doing a presentation. Each time asking like: ‘Okay, are we able to go to the next stage process?’ We need in parallel build a plan for the integration, so integration plan showing that we have secure the proper integration resources and that we understand that what action that of measures that needed to secure the value in the company” (R5).

From the conducted interviews has the role of resources been discussed. It is important from a managerial point of view of creating possibilities for learning (R1, R2, R3 & R5).
According to respondent 1, the prerequisite to always have enough resources is not always the reality. If the size of the transaction is relatively small in comparison to their own company, the case tends to not be prioritized high enough to be fully resourced. Thus, one acquisition faced difficulties, that are still hanging around, because the team could not manage the integration in lack of the proper resourcing. Consequently, the acquisition cost was even higher than planned (R1). The perspective of resources from the interview are much about the human related resources. For example, respondent 1 tells that they have pin-pointed resources of teams participating in the M&A process, but if they fail and the deal won’t be go through, they are all excluded from the buying company. Elaborated below:

“For an example in the case of X, now that we haven’t closed. I mean we have made a proposition that we are buying Y, and this is out in the media. Now after the proposition, the integration team’s members will get information when they start from data in the clean room. They will not be able to discuss and share information with the rest of the organization, they are under confidentiality” (R1).

Respondent 2 elaborated that conscious efforts can be made to have in-house resources with previous experience, which have been taking more seriously now in the subsequent acquisitions. Because the management have come to the insight that it really eases to process to invest in that kind of resources. Moreover, respondent 2 believes this is good, because the value erosion can be significant. So, it is regarded as pay-off when everything falls out as planned, even if it takes time in the early phases. Respondent 3 requests that more full-time M&A resources could be desirable, because looking back to previous acquisition, the integration work should start earlier. Especially in those cases where regional post-merger integration occurs. With suggestions to start the work-streams earlier, which could be understood from the integration manuals. Respondent 5 talks about securing enough resources in the external help, which are in line with increased view of professionalism and more systematically integration approach. Also mentioned in some cases, it is important to secure the value of the company and have proper resources to get gate-approval and moving on to the following phase. Thus, the business case giving support in that sense.

Another important aspect in the planning of an M&A is uncertainty variable – the one that cannot be foreseen. Respondent 2, 4 and 5 emphasize the impact of external variance, which impact the company’s integration progress and can only be planned to a certain extent. Respondent 3 expresses themselves through following words:

“You have to realize that last three years has been extremely tough for us when it comes to the business environment. Then you change your troops to maybe other directions” (R3).

Respondent 1 and 5 also mentions the difficulties in learning. The planning process itself serves as foundation for learnings, but external factors cause rupture in the planning process. This then calls for change of plans to put down fires and re-arrange the resources, as respondent 3 also mentions above. Even though the purpose of the transaction appears to be good, rationale and thought-through – the actual outcome can turn out to be precarious in terms of value-loss. Respondent 5 elaborates the topic by stating that the
company’s history of integrations has repeated itself in that sense. Good intentions turn out bad due to failing environmental factors, e.g. marked-related or internal fallacies.

Not only the world-spanning crisis in 2008 has affected the company’s integration successes. For instance, previously mentioning the impediments of measuring success or failure due to rapidly changing environment and premises, respondent 2 elaborates the answer and discusses the oil crisis as contributing factor to integration challenges:

“When I mentioned these couple of acquisitions back in 2013 and 2014, one in Germany and one in Norway, so those were made during a time when business was still very good. But then, very soon after the closing of those transactions, the market fell apart really. […] The oil crisis started to come down and basically the whole dynamics behind the offshore field started to change so those are something that are really hard to predict what will happen” (R2).

Respondent 5 discusses timing and the timing factor in the M&A-process. Hence, the respondents reflected upon how the Lehman Brothers crisis and the market circumstances influence the decision-making in a M&A context. About how market peaks, valuation and pricing is vital, in case of calculation and to make assessments in an adequate manner. Thus, and mean that there can be a tendency of optimism in valuation from the selling side when the market is peaking. This will indirectly affect the pricing but also have other consequences when the deal is over, according to respondent 5. Often measured by different multiples in relation to the previous profits. Interview 5 further states that this is challenging for an M&A function; to not pay higher price than the actual valuation. To have transparency about the targeted firm’s actual performance in figures and to acquire at the right time – timing in the acquisition. For example, respondent 5 declares that:

“I think looking back, timing is a critical thing. And looking at what company Y has for instance, then quite recently published two acquisitions in quite difficult times for company Y, and also for the market at large. I think that’s what should actually be done more than it usually is. For example, consultants often at times say you should swim against the stream and buy when the economy at large are not performing so well, when the target companies are not performing. And there’s a lower performance and lower evaluation multiples and so on. Obviously, it’s difficult for companies to justify that kind of behavior to their boards” (R5).

Respondent 1 tells that a general problem is that one acquisition can contain a whole portfolio of different new brands. Seeing all of the brand as alive is emphasized as challenging. Newly acquired brands is a part of the former organization and the people appertain to that firm (R1). Same interview also mention that a brand is often somebody’s baby and therefore it can be hard to separate them. Conclusively, this could be recognized in the interviews as a question of value (R1 & R5). For example, if the brands start to lose value after an acquisition. This has been further reflected on by respondent 1, whom claims total integration should be evaluated between the targeted firm’s brands and the acquiring firm. To see examples of how strong the brands are. Interviewed 5 points out the importance to sustain the value of a M&A deal. Exemplified, if one company is bought and integration has started, and the previous organization is reformed, the heritage
and DNA can be lost. Respondent 5 mentions this as a good intention of buying, which can turn out in a bad case of value erosion and a waste of money.

To summarize, the most of planning’s activity resides in the creation of a solid business case. This is basically a best-case-scenario construction in which all aspects of desired outcomes are reviewed for. During the process, the business case is continuously evaluated. On the discussion of milestones, there is a discrepancy between the manuals and the respondents. The latter do not recall the focus mentioned in the manuals. Also, the time-frame is most commonly – yet implicitly – understood to be 100 days. There is usually a lack of resources, although the manuals recommend sound planning. Lastly, external factors often disrupt the integration, causing delays and problems.

5.6 Environmental learning
The influence of culture and crossing borders when acquiring – or divesting or being acquired – another company has a significant impact, according to our respondents. Cultural influence is highly present in negotiation stage, transaction phase and later integration stage. Due to cultural discrepancy, the line to decide integration completion is blurry and thin. Respondent 1 elaborates the discussion by saying that it is “hard to draw a line between what is integration and what is just cultural differences”. The process of doing integrations in Scandinavia is perceived as more straight-forward and painless, according to respondent 1 and 3. Adding the cultural differences in Turkey or Asia for instance, it leads to a variety of contemplations. How messages should be delivered, how honest the messages could be and how the negotiation techniques should be handled. Additionally, independent of global position, if the strategical rationales behind the acquisition is clearly communicated and delivered, the cultural dissimilarities should be manageable. Acquiring company needs to be certain of its own core business to an extent that acquired business can be enlightened its supplementary role. On the topic of extracting learnings from doing foreign acquisitions, resourcing and preparation together with adaptable mindset is mentioned. Respondent 2 quotes Niccolò Machiavelli’s “The Prince” when describing how a company should reason when acquiring a firm outside its own border:

“He explains, you know, if you and acquire a principality far away from where you are located, and you acquire a principality where they have a different culture, different language, et cetera – be sure to add more resources against that one integration so it works on a sustainable basis. Whereas, if you acquire a principality close-by to you, where they talk the same language, they have the same culture, then it takes less. So, then you can rely on that it’s a lighter exercise. I would answer your question by referring to Machiavelli’s ‘The Prince’” (R2).

Furthermore, respondent 1 and 2 talk about cultural analysis in the due diligence process as present when the acquiring company is assessing the target company. For instance, if the different values that both companies incorporate may be too distant, the work that follows is different. The cultural aspects are therefore present in the due diligence phase, since the high-order integration plan needs to take such variables into calculation when constructing the time-line and plan. Moreover, the importance of local presence is discussed, in order to handle the soft factor issues by being there physically. Communication, which local presence solves, ensures that important messages gets
forward and that the vision is disseminated amongst the target company’s personnel. However, and more interestingly, the word culture is not mentioned one single time in the integration manuals or the lesson learned documents, nor is it discussed in any culture-suggesting way. Only in the due diligence process is culture discussed in terms of procedural necessity. Thus, only tacit knowledge, or knowledge shared amongst the integration team members, about cultural aspects can be present in the integration phase. Conclusively, respondent 4 discusses the problem of cultural distance even within the same country. After having done acquisitions in Norway, they could see a clear discrepancy from the northern and southern part even in the same country, to a degree one doesn’t see even between countries. However, when it concerns the same country, there is more about mentality and mind-set rather than culture.

Sub-categorizing culture do closeness and fear, according to two of our respondents (R1 & R5). Firstly, closeness, in terms of how far away the distant target company is – geographically and value-wise. Second, fear, which concerns both employees and the acquiring company. The employees in the aspect of insecurity, their job situation; the purchasing entity in aspects of measurement. To the extent of failure, which cannot be measured properly due to fear of realizing the costs, which respondent 1 accentuates. However, we can see that the abovementioned factors are intertwined in some sense. The respondent 1 discusses the relationship between the factors as almost correlated, yet, not explicitly stating so. The greater the distance, the greater is the possibility for fear to stalk the acquisition, since no local presence may be guaranteed. Then the decisions cannot as easily be monitored; communication channels might be trickier to establish and maintain. The distance implies cultural and strategical difficulties, which is reflected upon from one respondent further:

“But from previous experiences we had some acquisitions that went totally wrong in every sense and have been hanging there for like many years, and trying to sell some real-estate, and sell parts of the business, and for that one I think it wasn’t really analyzed. Nobody really dares to calculated how much that really cost. But it is usually a finger pointing at something so, if it is a totally failure you can tell without making the analysis.” (R1).

Looking at the matter from a perspective of business environment, it tends to show that passing on learnings from previous integration projects fluctuates in interest and intent. One of the respondent, whom played a role in the preceding acquisitions of the latest two, verbalizes how their experience has not been asked for by the new integration team. In total, only a short meeting between themselves and new integration team members has taken place, with ambitions to hand-over necessary information. Thus, sharing and handing-over has not been prioritized by the organization or the integration team. The respondent expresses it as follows:

“Yes, I shared it with the new team, I have forwarded it to them. But I have not had any discussion with them. From one team I got some questions, from the other one I haven’t got any questions. It could probably have been done a little bit better, so I don’t know how much they’ve read about it, how much they have looked into it, if they just didn’t do anything with them so. That could have been better” (R3).
6. Analysis and discussion
In the following chapter, we discuss and analyze our empirical findings in the prism of our theoretical framework. The major headings resided in empirical findings are foundation as to which the discussion is based upon. Lastly, we present a revised theoretical tool with which we demonstrate the discrepancy between our theoretical framework and empirical findings in our case study.

6.1 M&A Integration teams
The single most noteworthy, explicit trait that appears in our empirical finding is the company’s deployment of integration teams. In general, there is a couple of teams working with the M&A process from screening phase. However, the integration process initiates with the nomination of an integration manager and the selection of members to constitute the integration team. Our respondent portrayed the selection process – including both process of selection and criterions – rather pragmatic and functional, with focus on business knowledge as priority. There is a balanced division of positions between employees from both target and acquiring company in which the members take on the project part-time, except the integration manager. Contrasting this to the literature, we see that integration teams are highlighted by Tetenbaum (1999, p. 29) and Salama et al. (2003, p. 319) as reasons for success in the integration phase. On the contrary, Marks and Mirvis (2011, p. 163) appear negative to the thought of such teams; based on lack of experience from similar endeavors, having usually insufficient knowledge about M&A processes. Developing on the theory from Tetenbaum (1999, p. 29) and Salama et al. (2003, p. 319), we identify their call for full-time resources in order to cope with the magnitude an acquisition constitutes. Our empirical findings disclose the lack of both full-time resources and upper-management support, as stated in the lesson learned document. Hence, the preconditions for a high-functional integration team is thus lacking, making the discrepancy distinct in our case. Further, the lack of experience amongst the members supports Marks and Mirvis’s (2011, p. 163) theorizing that insufficient experience causes no direct superiority. The selection process renders new members for each integration, resulting in no accumulated experience for the resources other than upper-management, which supervise and control the process through their engagement in the steering committee. Therefore, together with the statements from our respondents regarding the variety in success, we interpret the company’s deployment of integration teams as different in comparison to the literature. The qualifications suggested in our theoretical framework is not fulfilled in the empirical findings, which may indicate some tendency in the general performance, based strictly on the mentioned theorization. Moreover, we believe the deployment of integration teams could be refined through proper support, but also by implementation of experienced resources in order to build M&A capabilities.

Elaborating on capabilities, and more specifically dynamic capabilities, we can draw some parallels between certain aspects of integration teams and creation of dynamic capabilities. Looking solely on the aspect of environmental change mentioned by Teece et al. (1997, p. 510) and Eisenhardt and Martin (2000, p. 1107), a few traits in the empirical findings elucidates how the development of such capabilities may be hampered through constant rotation. For instance, Teece et al. (1997, p. 510) accentuate the need for competences to be build, and inimitable to their nature in order for dynamic capabilities to be created. The authors discuss how replication of performance is an important concept, since simply transferring information in forms of explicit knowledge
could be an insufficient condition when performing advanced tasks (Teece et al., 1997, p. 525). Thus, there is a need for repetitiveness to develop dynamic capabilities, since the explicit material needs to be complemented with competence. Further, Eisenhardt and Martin’s (2000, p. 1107) conceptualization of dynamic capabilities also encompass repetitiveness as factor for progress (Barreto, 2009, p. 262). In their postulation, they suggest that practice needs to be done continually, which suggests a learning aspect for the involved parties in order for capabilities to be developed through a stable pattern of change. Nonetheless, both authors state that the environmental characteristic can also be exclusively external, since no direct suggestion about internal compliment in the discourse of environment is reasoned about. Our interpretation of this theory in disparity to our empirical findings is that frequent rotation result in loss of the stable pattern on an employee level. The upper-management, which are involved in all acquisitions, is potentially a target to developing dynamic capabilities in regards of this particular aspect. However, neither the integration team or the integration manager is able to develop such capabilities due to their short-lived experience. We interpret the rotation as necessary from a strategical point of view, given the different acquisition’s different business areas and purpose. Yet, the high-order capabilities may suffer from this strategy, if regarded through the prism of Teece et al. (1997, p. 21) and Martin and Eisenhardt’s (2000, p. 1107) conceptualization. We will return to the other aspect of dynamic capability creation – routines – further below in section 6.2.

Another interesting aspect we found in the empirical material, which have not figured anywhere in our explored M&A literature, is the arrangement of a “clean team”. As described in findings, the purpose of a clean team is to administer sensitive material from each respective company, not yet exposed to responsible company’s top management. We have not encountered the appearance of clean teams before, which is surprising. The members in the clean team is metaphorically signing up for a suicide mission: if the acquisition is not realized, the exposed employees must leave the company immediately due to their toxic possession of sensitive knowledge. The application is voluntarily, which our respondents underline, but potentially employment-wise fatal. Only external personnel (e.g. hired consultants) are allowed to see the sensitive material. Aside from internal resources, and thus is responsible for the verdict to proceed or not with the acquisition. Since it permeates all phases in the acquisition up until authority approval. Yet, we see some implications which could affect the company strategically to some extent.

To problematize, Cartwright and Cooper (1993, p. 58) and Marks and Mirvis (2011, p. 162) highlights financial valuation and strategical intents as variables which could potentially impede the integration. Cartwright and Cooper (1993, 58) argue that financial valuation preceding the acquisition is often first to be examined if the deal breaks, which is in itself underpinned by a variety of variables, including customers or certain procurement deals. Marks and Mirvis (2011, p. 162) argue that strategic intents – shaped as synergy expectations for instance – may be poorly articulated or even understood. Theoretically, the unobtainable sensitive information may pose a potential biased material upon which synergy calculations are based. Entrusting external consultants to recommend the acquisition to proceed or be terminated could be regarded as a risk. The company may have certain strategical intents with the target company that may be poorly communicated to the consultants, which in turn might recommend green-light albeit the calculated synergies could not be realized if some information is flawed. Most probably, this risk is calculated, and the intentions are well-communicated to the external consultants.
However, if the communication is poor and certain strategical rationales are calculated with illusory information as foundation, the company could suffer future revenue loss due to unrealized synergies or obstructions figured in the clean team’s material. Conclusively, we find the appearance of such clean team completely new to our knowledge and must therefore be future studied in order for general conclusions to be drawn, or even mediating role unrevealed.

Interpreting the conducted interviews, several respondents agree upon the fact that communication should be clear, transparent and advocate simplicity. Saunders et al. (2009, p. 1371) argue that it is vital and should be even more prominent in a M&A context. One respondent particularly highlights that communication occurs on too many fronts in the M&A process of current integrations. This ambiguity in communication have a negative impact on the performance according to the respondents because of uncertainties and stress impact. Some interviewees declared that if communication is not properly managed, the consequences might be misinterpretations and contra productive behaviour. Not only the internal M&A team communication, but also the on-going flow of information towards the targeted firm could be affected by such issues of communication. Ahammad et al. (2016, p. 445) also stipulate this as challenging and underlines that transparency between the acquiring and targeted firm is important to handle different team expectations in cross-border acquisitions – especially in the negotiating phase. We could also find that the integration manuals point out the necessity of straightforwardness in team communication. This is interesting because Ahammad and Glaister (2011, p. 59) claim that the effect of a M&A team facing communication anxiety can lead back to negative emotions of managers and foster conflicts, decreased commitment and performance. Observably, “over-communication” has been outlined as an obstacle, which according to us also concern what previous literature have highlighted. Vague communication – not too little, not too much – strategy can impede the realized practices and cause uncertainty (Reus & Lemont, 2009, p. 1371). From our understanding, the overall issue in the communication management is to not suffer from the lack of poor communication, but to fall into the trap of having a heavy stream of information on too many fronts. We could also notice that other factors as geographical, cultural and the timely aspects will have an impact on how communication is perceived, which aligns with the literature (Marks & Mirvis, 2011, p. 163; Schweiger & Goulet, 2000, p. 69). Conclusively, our overall view on the communication topic comes down to the point of being a “scale pan”. Thus, to find a balance between the extent and the amount of information that will be communicated within the M&A team and externally towards the targeted firm in the M&A process.

6.2 Techniques for learning
As demonstrated in the empirical findings, our case displays certain variation in learning artefacts and activities: integration manuals, meetings, lesson learned and workshops. Yet, we interpret that the degree to which activities are learned fluctuates, looking through the lens of our theoretical framework and the empirical material. Initially, applying the artefacts and activities mentioned above in a deliberate learning perspective, different tendencies can be illustrated (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 341; Singh & Zollo, 1998, p. 32; Kale & Singh, 2007, p. 985). More specifically, we interpret the different mechanisms as: articulation, codification, sharing and internalization. Meetings, informal and formal, together with workshops constitute the majority of which articulation could be ascribed. Involved personnel exchange experience and discuss progress, regress or stagnation
mostly in terms of how well the strategical rationales and synergies have been met. The manuals serve as examples of how processes are codified. Also, the lesson learned can to some extent count as codification of knowledge, albeit the scarce documentation results in a session closer to sharing than codification. Thus, lesson learned sessions concluding the integration project should be regarded as sharing, together with workshops, which aligns with Brown and Duguid’s (1991, p. 48) view upon sharing, in the aspect of disseminating knowledge and with emphasis on the absorptive capacity, rather than simple articulation and exchange. Lastly, we believe the workshops and lesson learned should be ascribed activities within the last action of deliberate learning, that is, internalization. However, as stated in the beginning, we interpret that each four theoretical actions attain different attention within the company.

To elaborate and problematize on these activities, we believe that the noteworthy implications are stemming in the imbalanced focus amidst all activities. We believe with support from Zollo and Winter (2002, p. 341), Singh and Zollo (1998, p. 17) and Kale and Singh (2007, p. 984) that articulation and codification of the company’s knowledge from the integrations phases are well conducted. Zollo and Winter (2002, p. 342) mention explicitly how articulation structures through discussions and evaluation sessions, which we ascribe meetings and workshops to be in this case. Further, the process of articulation involves both focal integration and previous endeavours, by which they can help transcend new members by providing necessary relationships between occurrences, only known due to experience. Hence, we interpret articulation to be adequate and in line with theoretical suggestions. Moreover, the codification process aligns with Singh and Zollo (1998, p. 18) and Zollo and Winter’s (2002, p. 342) description of conveying explicit knowledge, i.e. know-what and know-how, into codified materials such as manuals. The company has developed two extensive manuals for their integration process, with multiple templates as appendixes, which we also regarded as codified knowledge with support from Zollo and Winter (2002, p. 342). However, as reservation, the manuals were constructed subsequent to the deals in 2013-2014, both in which success was not ever present. The now on-going integrations are using the incumbent manuals as facilitators, according to our respondents, which implies that outcome has not yet been established and can thus not been argued through the manuals. Yet, we believe it is noteworthy that the manuals now being used concludes processes which evidently did not enhance value for the company. They have not been revised although subsequent years has illuminated improvable aspects in the processes.

Despite the methodical procedure with the first two activities, we believe the imbalance are due to errors in sharing and internalization of knowledge, in comparison to the literature. The integration team engage in sharing amongst themselves succeeding an integration, wherein the lesson learned session is arranged to capture the employees’ viewpoint of what went well and what could have been improved. The empirical material discloses these attempts to draw learnings, but also to evaluate the “accomplished” integration – with reservation that some integrations are still dragging, according to our interviews. Nonetheless, we find instances to question the sufficiency of these lesson learned given their extensiveness; we have retrieved two documents, both in which only one PowerPoint-slide remarks “good” and “improvable” points, with short, concluding sentences. Furthermore, our major objection of the company’s now deployed sharing strategy relies in the fluctuation and rotation of the integration team. By taking a knowledge-based view of the phenomenon, Nonaka (1994, p. 20) emphasizes personal meaning attached to explicit knowledge, that is, as complement to codified
knowledge. There needs to be personal infusion of interpretation accompanying the explicit knowledge, e.g. manual. Kogut and Zander (1996, p. 510) also argue from a knowledge-based view that learning requires an identification of desired ability, not only to be transfused to individuals. The authors suggest that individuals possessing desired skills need to bestow with interpretations of how to translate the manuals from simple know-how to meaningful know-why. Kale and Singh (2007, p. 986) support this postulation by suggesting learning does not simply happen through exposure of explicit knowledge to personally apprehended tacit knowledge, which touches upon next step, namely internalization.

Nonaka (1994, p. 20) postulates that learning requires interaction zones, wherein the members experience a climate of freely articulating and sharing perspectives of knowledge. In this interaction, the individuals enter a spiral of a stable, systematic process in which learnings can furnish through internalization, since there is an engagement between experience and knowledge (Shakeri & Radfar, 2017, p. 298). Thus, the individuals “is becoming practitioners not learning about practice” as suggested by Brown and Duguid (1991, p. 48). Moreover, we believe the rotation of integration team members breaks this stringency of learning spiral, because the members accountable for the focal integration only shares the experience with one another (March et al., 2003, p. 467). Later, when a new acquisition is undertaken, the new integration team only receives integration manuals in which know-how and know-what is demonstrated, but lacks the know-why, resides in the members no longer involved in the acquisition and responsible for the integration manual. According to our empirical material, the old integration team do not share their experience to the new team, since there is no high-order contingency between the acquisition, aside the codified material. Therefore, we argue that the one substantial drawback is due to the lack of sharing on an organizational level. Transcending the one isolated acquisition and thus becoming a stringent strategy to the extent our respondents envision. Subsequently, this impedes the transfer of experience to succeeding acquisition, given the lack of process for higher-order learning amidst acquisitions and individuals. Lastly, Junni (2011, p. 317) suggests the transfer of tacit knowledge could benefit from the identity mentioned by Kogut and Zander (1996, p. 510), which further strengthen our identification of previous members’ importance to proceed learning. For instance, by having experienced individuals as mentors/sponsors to subsequent acquisitions.

From our empirical data, we found that routines are interpreted in a different manner compared to the theoretical explanation. Some respondents perceive that routines are established and occur in a recognizable systematic pattern as Howard-Grenville (2005, p. 629) and Zollo and Winter (2002, p. 340) accentuate. Even though they are partially unclear about how the routines are revised and improved. Thus, routines are recognized within the interviews as common practices of team formations, checklists, integration manuals and other documentation such as the decision making and planning process. However, we noticed a lack of focus on this topic, in the sense that several respondents either believe or presume that team setups and more obvious learning manuals are part of and could be considerate as routine-wise. Henceforth, the respondents’ understanding could be dependent on the degree of involvement in each acquisition project. Likewise, as the lack of deliberate strategies of how routine-based work should be carried out comes from upper management. Felin et al. (2012, p. 1364-65) emphasize the importance of effective routine coordination and information sharing from the organization. From our notion, the unique context of newly established team for each acquisition may be a reason
the uncleanness in the view of routines as procedural. Moreover, there is varied insight by the respondents regarding the creation and maintenance of organization routines. How routines are managed conscious or not in the work, which our respondents’ interpretation demonstrates. The reasons for this, according to previous literature, could be the subjectivity of routines in individual understanding of different time and place (Feldman & Pentland, 2003, p. 93). Remarkably from our case study interviews is that routines are present, but they might not be utilized in the wide extent they potentially could. Further, a prominent viewpoint from that statement is that the investigated organization could put more effort into managing routines. For example, several respondents support the fact that these practices of manuals and team formations are not given time to reflect and evaluate upon. Consequently, the routines are used but not always improved and revised in order to carry learnings further from previous acquisitions to subsequent ones for enhancing dynamic capabilities.

We previously discussed dynamic perspective in section 6.1 through one essential aspect, namely, environment dependency. We will elaborate on that subject through one underpinning variable in our theoretical framework, that is, routines (Teece et al., 1997, p. 510; Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 5; Mohamud & Sarpong, 2016, p. 512; Easterby-Smith et al., 2009, p. 4; Ambrosini & Bowman, 2009, p. 29). We can identify some touching point between our theoretical and empirical findings. First, as for our understanding, the term “routines” is not well-established within the organization, at least to no further extent than identification of certain activities as routinely performed. Hence, the focus accentuated by Teece et al. (1997, p. 510) and Eisenhardt and Martin (2000, p. 1107) on the process itself is lacking. There is no deliberate line of idea about the reconfiguration of resources to rejuvenate desired, potential competitive advantages. Instead, there is a practical idea underpinning the decisions, before any deliberate creation of capabilities. Teece et al. (1997, p. 525) argue that routines are foundation to create inimitable capabilities through routines, for routines provide the company with indifferent processes to competitors, which infers competitive advantage. Interpreted strictly from our theoretical framework in contrast to our empirical material, Teece et al. (1997, p. 525) reason that codification of tacit knowledge is critical for developing dynamic capabilities. That is performed, and thus theoretical potential in their postulation is achieved.

Moreover, the company’s perception of routines does not fully correspond with Zollo and Winter’s (2002, p. 5) idea of dynamic capability creation, and partly in their notion of utilization. As for moment, however, the future still holds no convictions. We assume this standpoint based of partly accomplished premises. First, one part of Zollo and Winter’s (2002, p. 6) theorization debates organizational routines, that is, day-to-day operations. We interpret this as materialized through the integration manuals and templates, both of which facilitates every-day operations in the integration process. Further, Zollo and Winter (2002, p. 340) argue that deliberate learning mechanisms generates routines. Through the activities of accumulation, articulation and codification – all of which we can determine has been conducted. However, the break in stringency occurs at the company’s lack of advancing from operation routines to high-order. Revitalizing routines – labeled as dynamic capabilities – to systematically improve operational routines through learning and modification (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 340). As we can interpret the empirical material, the routines now in place was developed following the two last acquisitions in 2013-2014 and have not been revised since. Therefore, we assume the standpoint that only operational routines are in place. With no “meta-routines” to reinvent operational routines yet in place, the company is ineligible to be ascribed in possession
of dynamic capabilities, in the aspect of the literature. Furthermore, Ambrosini and Bowman (2009, p. 29) originate their viewpoint from the VRIN-model, with importance placed upon valuable combination. We believe, given our respondents’ position on the previous integrations’ outcome, that no particular value – beside the achieved synergies – have been created in the integration phase as an isolated event. Our empirical material disclose dissatisfaction with the integration as such, within which the targets were not fulfilled, and not yet even implemented according to respondent 6. Hence, we believe Ambrosoini and Bowmans’ (2009, p. 29) postulated prerequisites is not fulfilled enough to be labeled dynamic capabilities in that sense we have discussed it; in terms of process-wise superiority. Conclusively, we believe with the growing desire to create a constant flow in the acquisition pipeline, there is potential to establish further advanced capabilities in connection to the integration process in the future.

6.3 Integration strategy
What concerns the integration strategy used for historical integration; it alters in both implementation and outcome. Comparing to our theoretical framework, we see that the empirical material provides indications of external pressure in addition to internal mentality. Yet, the strategies could best be explained as dichotomies representing each end of a spectrum. Either full take-over or abstention, which both can be linked to the integration approaches delineated in our theoretical review (Haspeslagh & Jemison, 1991, p. 146; Marks & Mirvis, 2001, p. 85; Kale, 2009; Dobbs & Gupta, 2009; Kumar, 2009, p. 1). The most common practice throughout the company’s history is according to our respondents to fully absorb the target company. A full-scale takeover, which is argued by Haspeslagh and Jemison (1991, p. 147) to be the most universally embraced strategy in the cases of acquisition. Marks and Mirvis (2001, p. 85) also label this strategy as in their model as absorption. In the case for our studied company, the strategy is usually to plan the integration to be finalized within 100 days – even though the timeframe normally expands. Within this time-period, decisions taken on beforehand – regarding the brand, organization, synergies (reviewed for further below) – are operationalized to as fast as possible implement most practices. Additionally, the integration manuals recommend the decision concerning degree of integration to be made before initiating integration phase, in order to calibrate to which degree operations are organized. However, as our empirical material shows: this strategy does not guarantee successful integrations. Instead, the interviewees disclose a number of 50 % successful and 50 % unrewarding. One of the respondents portrays that especially two of their ten conducted acquisitions have been surprisingly successful when adopting the strategy contrary to full-scale adoption – preservation, or, partnering.

Remarkably, only two acquisitions in the history of the company’s history of acquisition was highlighted to be rewarding. From our interpretations, our respondents were moderate to label all acquisitions as either successful or failed, due to their interpretation of external influence to trouble the measurement. We interpreted their answers as explanations for why certain acquisitions had not achieved preset targets, which we can in turn interpret as discontent. However, the common practice for the couple of highlighted integration was in essence the lack of integration, in which the company adopted what Marks and Mirvis (2001, p. 85) and Haspeslagh and Jemison (1991, p. 145) both describe as preservation. The target company maintains their strategy and culture, keeping their autonomy intact and distant from the acquiring company. In alignment with Kumar’s (2009, p. 4) theory about partnering when supplementary intentions are drivers,
the respondent declared the complementary intentions preceding the deal. A core business outside the knowledge base of the acquiring company, was the principal reason to abstain integration. This is also supported by Kale et al. (2009) and Dobbs and Gupta’s (2009) articles in which they emphasize that sharing the knowledge creates a competitive advantage that could not been achieved separately. Yet, instead of seeing the phenomenon as synergies extractable through integration, the lack of knowledge prevails courage in deciding not to integrate. Therefore, we initially found it strange that this strategy has not been adopted more often, since the company themselves are aware of the potential of abstention.

However, from the interviews, we got the perception of a mentality surrounding the industry, not only internal, which to some degree pushes companies in general, but particularly our company, to fully integrate the acquired companies. This is because contractors and customers upon which the company is dependent expects the now merged two companies to act as one – not two independent vendors. We have not been able to see indications of these tendencies when establishing the theoretical framework. Our interpretation is that industrial mentality, and to some degree company mentality, dictates the integration strategy more than rational deduction occasionally. Theoretically, from our point of view, the company would have adopted the preservative/partnering approach more frequently based on their perception about these acquisitions’ outcome. Having difficulties, the one after the other, as means of traditional industrial common practice with full-scale integration. Then experiencing positive outcomes with hand-off approach, we would assume the company would have adopted this in approach in subsequent integrations. We believe from our empirical material that the dogmatic mentality to full-scale integrations stems from the perceived internal superiority which infers a conviction that the company – inhabited with knowledge and market power – must be able to perform full-scale integrations. If yet the process of doing so is under modification until the panacea is found. Conclusively, we believe that the pervasive belief of synergy greatness together with external pressure locks the mindset to absorptive strategy, instead of open-minded reflect upon previous endeavors and alter the strategy.

Continuing on synergies, the company’s entire integration strategy is based upon synergy realization, as can be understood from the empirical material. Both in the interviews and integrations manuals. In convergence with our theoretical postulations, synergies are the sole strategical driver for the acquisitions (Seth et al., 2000, p. 389; Brock, 2005, p. 271; Gomes et al., 2013, p. 15). Despite the common reference to pre-merger driver, we can state that synergy realization is stringently the foremost mission in the integration phase. The focus of this study is post-merger integration phase, in which synergies are usually not discussed in the literature to same extent as in pre-merger phase. We are convinced our empirical material provide us with enough material to neglect synergies as habitant in post-merger integration phase. Comparing the empirical material on synergies with strategic and organization fit, there is resemblance and deviation (Jemison & Sitkin, 1986a, p. 146; Bauer & Matzler, 2014, p. 272; Morresi & Pezzi, 2014, p. 122). The notion of strategic fit as most agreed precondition can be supported by our studied acquisitions to the degree that synergies dictates decisions (Jemison & Sitkin, 1986b). In our case, strategic fit is shaped as market growth strategies; adding new products to the portfolio, strengthening existing portfolio and gaining market shares, which is are argued to add value for the company (Haseslagh & Jemison, 1991, p. 60; Jemison & Sitkin, 1986a, p. 146). The subsequent integration phase has revolved around these how these synergies best be extracted. However, an interesting aspect is that we interpret organizational fit to
be affected by the sole focus on the synergies, which causes organizational issues to be solved instantly, rather than planned on beforehand. As our respondents mention, the human side is given considerations, and is also regarded as synergies in some – yet smaller – sense. Interestingly, given the aspect of cross-border acquisition, distance affects the degree to which organizational fit may be controlled by the parental company, according to our respondents. For instance, when having done deals overseas, on different continents, the organizational factors are hard to regulate in the same way as if the two companies shared home country. In line with both Morresi and Pezzi (2014, p. 121) and Shimizu et al., (2004, p. 333), the aspect of presence distresses the target company’s employees to a certain degree, resulting in different response to the focal deal. Therefore, the respondents stress, paying visits and presence affects to which degree the integration can be rolled out. This is in hand that certain synergies might be harder to extract, if the companies are too distant geographically. Since potentially lack of commitment might arise amongst the target company’s employees in the day-to-day business (Shimizu et al., 2004, p. 324; Morresi & Pezzi, 2014, p. 122). Also, ownership and responsibility could be afflicted by the long-distant position. Thus, the individuals in the target company feel less of responsibility for the integration than if closeness – locational and emotional – to the parent company prevailed.

6.4 Integration planning
As presented from our empirical review, the M&A lifecycle comprise several phases on a sequential timeline and represents the work of different functions. Following our interpretation of the interviews, we would highlight that the early phases, e.g. due-diligence, give the impression of being more solid and convenient by several respondents in relation to the post-merger integration planning phases. Also, more structured and tangible. Elaborately, this could be explained that the pre-work phases are closely and more strictly controlled by gate-approvals, which some respondents have emphasised in parallel to the post-merger integration phases. Clearly, we could notice challenges in the post-merger integration planning depending on the timely aspects. For instance, one postponed phase will affect the subsequence process. Henceforth, we could not notice any hubris or overconfidence in the subject of project managers as Aktas et al. (2009, p. 556) emphasise as a potential factor for optimistic and misguided planning.

Moreover, some respondents claim that there is a lack of stringency between pre and post-merger phases in our case. This has also been outlined in previous literature, which highlights the importance of understanding the interrelation between each phase in the M&A process (Stahl et al., 2013, p. 347; Gomes et al., 2013, p. 30). Some interviewees also accentuate the absence of support for the integration already in the early planning. The fact that different teams is working in different phases could also be understood as challenging. We believe this is interesting from what Gomes et al., (2013, p. 15) state about the acquisition phases, that the M&A process needs to adopt a more holistic view for all phases. Where importance lies in the belief that M&A phases should not be isolated. Moreover, this shows that communication could be important, which is also partly conformed by our interviews. Some respondents in our study explained that the linkage between pre and post-merger phase could be improved in the planning work. One respondent particularly elaborated on the fact that objectives and goal assumptions are made in the early phases about the acquisition, regarding what they want to accomplish. The problematizing is that once the first phase is done, the responsible team is often dismissed according to the respondent. Thus, when the post-merger integration team is
taking over, no responsibility from the pre-merger planning team and assumptions are longer present. Stahl et al. (2013, p. 334) and Cartwright and Cooper (1993, p. 58) categorize this as human related issue, the feeling of responsibility, which further strengthens the proposition of stringency in the entire process.

Most aspects of an integration can and needs to be planned on beforehand, in order to guide employees and management on the predetermined road map. We understand from our empirical findings that planning composes the core in every integration. Partly through the business case which works as benchmark and partly because of its synergy recognitions. Thus, the planning process is a natural part of the acquisition for the company. However, from our findings, we interpret that the uncertainties that cannot be reviewed for have played an excessive role in the handling process and outcome. As highlighted by the respondents, the market collapsed shortly after both acquisitions were finalized at the end of 2014. The collapse impeded the planned progression immensely. In parallel to integrating the newly acquired entities, a cataclysmic change-work was initiated in order to cope with external tremble. This gave consequences in retrospect on how fair valuation and calculations can be made, having the market collapse in mind when adjudicating the acquisitions. Furthermore, we can see similarities between our respondents’ reasoning and the theorization by Rouzies et al. (2018, p. 9). The authors postulate the need to step away from regarding the integration process as an isolated project within the company, independent from day-to-day operations. Instead, a perspective of co-evolution needs to be adopted in order to understand that there is a symbiosis between internal projects, which cannot be dethatched. Further, Rouzies et al. (2018, p. 9) identify two traits that distinguish in given circumstances: coordination and cohesion, which both enables integration to progress; or alienation and disconnection, which hampers the progression. We believe to descry especially disconnection as one contributing factor for the understood regression. As mentioned in the empirical material, one respondent believed that certain planned actions still have not been implemented, due to exogenous factors leading to shifted priorities. Hence, we believe there is resemblance in the literature from our empirical material. The integration needs to be planned, in detail and high-order, in every phase. But simultaneously, drawing parallels to previous discussion, the question whether the integration has been administered with a full-time resource affects how we interpret the matter. If there would have been full-time resources working on the integration, in which their only focus is the focal project, the outcome today could be different.

Another important aspect in planning is how learning is planned; to which degree and through what methodology. We believe to see a crystallized discrepancy between planned learning and realized learning. In essence, the integration manual has planned lessons learned session to capture relevant knowledge that has been developed. As previously elaborated, the integration manuals only provide recommendations. Yet, the recommendation is to capture lessons learned during the entire process, although the different phases overlaps. Hitherto, this session has been taking place at the end of planned integration project – as discussed, some projects still has not been completely consolidated. In alignment with the theoretical framework, experiential learning and learning-by-doing prevails deliberate learning to some degree (Reddy, 2015, p. 16; Haleblian et al., 2006, p. 357). However, we do not neglect the obvious connection to deliberate learning theory – we believe that articulation, codification and sharing features as operations to entail experiences and incarnate the employees with that knowledge (Zollo & Winter, 2002, p. 342; Singh & Zollo, 1998, p. 32). Nonetheless, we believe from
our respondents’ answers that learning has up until this point occurred by having the integration members involved in the M&A project, rather than deliberate learning actions. Lauser (2010, p. 11) points at the complexities of disentangling cause-affect-relationship with only being involved in a few acquisitions, also if the learning occurs in the end of a project, which have had external factors affecting it, as the case described by Rouzies et al. (2018, p. 9). Furthermore, with regards to the company’s historical M&A activity, the future might hold a continuity of acquisitions. We cannot identify a degeneration in activity from our interviews. This implies that the integration manuals’ planned learning needs to be calibrated how to capture experiences from a constant process of M&A’s – rather than one conclusive session in the end of each. Laamanen and Keil (2008, p. 670) stress that underlying mechanisms for learning with a serial acquirer strategy is independent of performance, that is, although the end-result is negative can learning capability be enhanced. Thus, we believe the learning strategy needs to be in relationship with the overall strategy.

Solid measurement has been ascribed by literature to facilitate M&A integration (Teerikangas & Very, 2006, p. 45; Saunder et al., 2009, p. 1371). Clear measurement defined on before-hand, which every involved individual knows what variables the valuation takes into consideration. We believe the company’s establishment of a business case, which serves as desired benchmark, is in proper alignment of Teerikangas and Very’s (2006, p. 45) definition of good measurement. It is clear what needs to be fulfilled and what achievements need to be accomplished. Nevertheless, the case of measurement has been discussed as complex when the external factors play a role. Should there maybe be different measurement when there has been a shift in presuppositions. This dilemma could serve as an excuse for the integration if the pre-set goals is not met. We believe there is a good alignment between the theoretical framework and empirical findings in that aspect. Furthermore, another interesting postulation is presented by Aktas et al. (2009, p. 556) who discusses hubris in acquisitions. Whether hubris infected CEO’s could affect the acquisition performance, which was supported by their theory. We have no reason to believe hubris has any part to play in the failed performance to accomplish the business cases. Instead, we argue that there is an interesting connection to be made between hubris and integration strategy. For instance, as discussed above, could there be a tendency of top management hubris to not be able to abstain full-scale integration when there are cases of successful integrations through preservation strategy. As discussed, we are aware of the external pressure from customers and vendors. However, it is an interesting question for future studies to see the interrelationship between hubris and integration strategy. We believe there are indications that when there is industry knowledge, and an acquisition takes place, there is seldom a mentality of preservation. This could theoretically be affected by hubris infection in the top management.

### 6.5 Environmental learning

Our last heading entails the cultural factor in cross-border M&A and how it affects learning. From our empirical material, we can distinguish that the respondents’ mentality shift when discussing foreign acquisitions. One clear example is the parable with Machiavelli’s “The Prince”, in which he explains how long-distance takeovers of principalities requires more dedicated work than do close-by acquisitions. This verdict receives support from our theoretical framework, which emphasizes the importance of careful management and more dedicated work of “soft” integration than strictly strategical (Schweiger & Goulet, 2000, p. 69; Piekkari et al., 2005, p. 332; Shimizu et al.,
In the aspect of our study, where learning is central, companies should focus on transferring cultural knowledge and foremost create understanding between target and acquiring company. Only then can strategical rationales be received by the target company’s employees (Björkman et al., 2007, p. 22). Thus, we interpret that physical presence facilitates not only the direct human integration, but indirect strategical integration since there has to be a foundation of trust in order to implement desired strategical changes. Discussing the matter in terms of learning, we believe in alignment with Ahammad and Glaister (2011, p. 62) and Shimizu et al. (2004, p. 332) that soft factors, e.g. anxiety, commitment, need to be cared for before the intentional, strategical integration is rolled out in full-scale. Given our scarce empirical material concerning cultural integration as an integration itself, we recede to draw any conclusions from our case study. Yet, it is noteworthy that “culture” is not mentioned once in neither integration manuals. Thus, we can only base our discussion on what the respondents have said in our interviews, where cultural awareness is present in all interviews. In the aspect of learning, we identify our case to be in alignment with Shimizu et al. (2004, p. 334) that the company has potential learnings – aside from strategical synergies – to be drawn from long-distant acquisitions in terms of cultural knowledge. If we connect that to the partnering strategy theory by Kale et al. (2009), we can see that combination of cultural distant resources can count for learning itself by regarding “soft” factors as synergies.

From our understanding, cross-border acquisitions could be labelled on almost all of the previous acquisitions in our case study. Hence, the M&As pose different degrees of cultural distance. Some respondents highlight this as closeness, both in values between the acquirer and target firms, also in geographical terms. Where similarities could be found in what Ahammad and Glaister (2011, p. 59-60) emphasise about that cross-border acquisition can foster challenges of communication, conflicts and commitment due to differences between firms. We believe that the respondents express that one main reason for a cross-border acquisition is to add additionally competitive advantages, which correlates with cross-border objectives by previous literature (Ahammad & Glaister, 2011, p. 62; Björkman et al., 2007, p. 11; Chakrabarti et al., 2009, p. 217). However, we could not notice that cross-border distance is a single outlined factor for delays of speed and closing due to post merger integration as Morresi and Pezzi (2014, p. 118-119) reflect. Furthermore, some respondents mentioned the difficulties by crossing borders in legal aspects of the M&A process could be demanding in new markets and time constraints. One substantial aspect from our point of view is that challenges in cross-border acquisitions might not be categorized as challenges particular for global acquisitions. Since our studied firm operates with cross-border acquisitions frequently, but instead plainly seen as general issues. The studied company’s organisation has made decisions to not integrate fully or use local resources to handle this process. One respondent postulates that one failure aspect is miscalculation of costs in a cross-border acquisition. This correlates with Schweiger and Goulet (2000, p. 77) who underline that more distant acquisition has aspects being more difficult in appreciations and demands more knowledge and skills for success. Noticeably, the studied firm shows awareness by the level of integration they apply in the previous M&A’s, which has been discussed by Shimizu et al. (2004, p. 333) in corporate and national cultural differences. Moreover, we understand the organization adjust this in relation to the fit between the acquirer and the targeted firm.
6.6 Revised theoretical tool
Based on our analysis and discussion, we have revised our initial theoretical tool. Our insights from the empirical data illuminated with our theoretical framework have crystalized certain discrepancies, which our revised theoretical tool portrays (see Figure 3). Initially, step one needs no revision, due to the fact acquisition experience transpire when a deal is imminent, independent of previous endeavors. Step two has been revised in the process flow between sharing and internalizing, and thus between internalizing and articulation as a result. We believe the insufficient efforts of internalizing the learnings to a higher degree than current practice does not align with the knowledge-based view of a firm, or deliberate learning theory discussed in section 6.2 above (Nonaka, 1994, p. 20; Kogut & Zander, 1996, p. 510; Kale & Singh, 2007, p. 986; Shakeri & Radfar, 2017, p. 298). Step three is not revised from the initial model, since M&A capabilities are still enhanced for the individuals in the integration team and top management, albeit the degree of which varies. Lastly, step four is revised due to the lack of transformation of capabilities as input together with experience. We argue that the arrow is broken due to the rotation of integration teams for every new acquisition integration. We believe there is a misalignment between the literature and empirical findings in which rotation infers no stringency in learning. Lack of experience from more than one case and thus an absence of repetitiveness (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000, p. 1107; Barreto, 2009, p. 262; March et al., 2003, p. 467). Therefore, the potential capability cannot be counted for in subsequent acquisitions, following the failure to build upon the current capability through new experience.

Figure 3. Revised theoretical tool. Own construction.
7. Conclusion

In the last chapter, we consider how the study’s purpose and research questions have been answered by our conducted study. Further, the theoretical contributions are discussed, in which we position our study within current theoretical landscape. Also, managerial implications are discussed for the case firm and similar firms who acquire. Further, practical recommendations are discussed for the case firm and similar firms who acquire. Lastly, the study’s limitations are discussed and propositions for future studies are specified.

7.1 Main findings

The purpose of our study was to understand how learnings are drawn from previous experiences in cross-border acquisitions and be utilized in subsequent acquisitions. The purpose was further narrowed and divided into two, guiding research questions which are:

(1) How can learnings be captured from previous experience in integration after cross-border acquisition?

(2) How can learnings from previous experience of cross-border integration be utilized in subsequent deals?

Our findings explicitly account for the first research question. The first main finding appears to be in accordance with the deliberate learning theory upon which this study is built (Zollo & Winter, 2002; Singh & Zollo, 1998; Kale & Singh, 2007; Zollo & Singh, 2004). The studied case exhibit four learning mechanisms: articulation, codification, sharing and internalizing. Albeit, our analysis illuminates an imbalance to what extent each mechanism is exercised. The principal activities and artefacts to capture learnings from cross-border integration experience are lessons learned sessions, workshops and integration manuals. Our findings further implicate the imbalance of focus placed upon each mechanism; articulation and codification receive a more considerable amount of attention in the process of transforming experience to explicit knowledge, whereas sharing and internalization are assumed to defectively practiced. In aspects of the knowledge-based view of a firm, the efforts to embody the knowledge are insufficient to become a practitioner – instead of learning about practice. Furthermore, our findings display a discrepancy between the desired degree of routinized learning presented in the codified material and the realized outcome as depicted in the empirical material.

The second research question is answered through the deployment of codified material. However, without complementing an interpretation of described processes in the integration manuals. Despite the efforts of capture the learnings from previous experience, our findings disclose a lack of holistic stringency in subsequently utilizing these learnings due to the rotation of individuals in the integration team. We assume the constant rotation of integration members for every acquisition hampers the development of building capabilities and prevents experience to be accumulated on an organizational level. The lack of repetitiveness forces the compounded integration team to perpetuate mistakes which could have been anticipated. Further, as our analysis disclose, the process of sharing experience between previous integration teams and members involved in the focal acquisition, together with the absent renovation of routines, suggests that inhabited experience erodes and remain resident in the individuals.
7.2 Theoretical contribution
In order to follow the stringency in this thesis, we will reflect to some extent how our study has contributed to the vast body of literature that is about merger and acquisitions, but also discuss how our study has answered the research gaps we identified in the introduction. Stahl et al. (2013, p. 338) requested deepening regarding how learnings are shaped and laid out, for developing an understanding of its different aspects. Haleblian et al. (2006, p. 357) postulated that one unexplored area concerns how companies accustom their strategies based on the reflection from previous endeavors. Zollo and Singh (2004, p. 1254) called for future studied on deliberate learning in other contexts than their studied bank sector. Our study addresses progression to abovementioned research gaps to some extent. First, our thesis contributes with findings how learning activities are being planned, executed and evaluated in an international company, which answers the call by Stahl et al. (2013, p. 338) through our study’s qualitative case method approach. Our findings illuminate how the process developing codified material and capture learnings is laid out, which complements the current body of literature. Further, by revealing the process of integration team’s assessment of integration strategy, the thesis accounts for how integration strategy is founded upon previous experience. Nonetheless, our contribution displays how previous experience is partly neglected in the selection of integration strategy, which responds Haleblian’s et al. (2006, p. 357) appeal from future studies. Moreover, as our case resides in the off-shore business, we believe the study adds a different context than Zollo and Singh (2004, p. 1254) studied, which elaborates the deliberate learning theory by adding different contexts and the outcome which are considered interesting.

Additionally, to above research gaps, we believe the study contributes to the literature through our analysis of deliberate learning theory together with the deployment of an integration team. Beyond the discussion of deliberate learning mechanisms in a stable environment of resources, our study contributes to the literature by adding how learning is captured when the individuals of which are objects of learning are continually changing. Very and Schweiger (2001, p. 29) called for research to “explain how experience is appropriately accumulated, utilized and subsequently institutionalized”, which our study provided findings of how there are shortcomings in the process chain when rotation is present compared to the literature. Insufficiency in institutionalization of acquisition knowledge is due to lack of experience sharing and internalizing from a knowledge-based view and deliberate learning theory perspective.

7.3 Managerial implications
From a managerial point of view, we conclusively present certain lessons that could be learned from our study. Firstly, we would suggest practitioners planning an acquiring strategy to bear in mind that a full-time M&A resource could be helpful in sharing of previous experiences from a post-merger integration into a subsequent integration. Hence, our findings elaborate on the challenges of newly established M&A teams between every new acquisition project with the lack of previous involvement in acquisition integration projects.

Secondly, our study demonstrates that different mechanisms from both theoretical and empirical viewpoints might be pivotal in the essence of learning from previous cross-border integration experiences. Outlined in our developed theoretical framework as articulation, codification, sharing and internalizing of learnings. With explicit tools as
integration manuals, workshops and lessons-learned evaluations. We claim that our study provides insight that sharing and internalizing of previous cross-border integration experiences requires more attention within an M&A project for deliberate learning and building dynamic capabilities.

Conclusively, the thesis might provide insights that the post-merger integration work needs to be earlier involved in the pre-merger planning phases. Hence, objectives and goal assumptions are constructed by the pre-planning team of the M&A projects, and latter differs in focus of communication when the post-integration team is taking over the acquisition project.

7.4 Social implications
Mergers and acquisitions as growth strategy elicits social and ethical consequences, applicable for business and societal settings. Given the background of current thesis, the forecast for M&A activity is not declining. Albeit predictions of forthcoming activity are hard to make, implications on markets and regulations can already be drawn. For instance, growing via acquisitions affects the competition situation in any affected market space. Acquiring the competition increases the chance of leaping closer to an imbalanced market, depending on the size and market share. Regulations and competitions law are therefore present, which acquiring company needs to take into consideration. Zooming out and looking at the strategy through a prism of legislation, there are circumstances ensuring that irresponsible or vainglorious mentality is prohibited. In this way, M&A activity can increase without harming the balance of the business eco system, to a reasonable level according to the legislation. Nonetheless, the legal framework affects the strategical choice of growth in combination of conducting responsible acquisitions to a certain degree. Problems in connection to hostile takeovers or monopoly-aiming rationales might be problematic to eradicate. But from a social point of view, the competition laws facilitate to prevent imbalances.

Further implications associated to our particular case study involves the collaboration, or rather the interaction between business actors on the Scandinavian market. From both a social point of view, together with an economical point of view: what could be the benefits of having cooperation amongst Scandinavian companies? By involving numerous companies across country borders, each respective domestic economy benefits; both in terms of investments but also employments. The interrelated business ties are strengthened and thus future collaborations, which might include new ventures, thus advantageous for each country and each economy.

7.5 Limitations and future research
The limitations we will discuss are two-fold: method-related and theoretical-related. Starting with the limitations concerning our method, we reflect upon the fact of having six respondents. Although every participant has valuable experience – profound descriptions and contextual insight would have been improved through a larger sample of respondents. Another drawback related to our method is due to the single case studied. In alignment with Cooper and Schindler (2011, p. 181), who argues for the lack of cross-analysis given the limited numbers of cases, we identify the shortcoming of our chosen procedure. Noteworthy, we argue that the limitation is distant to the issue of generalizability, since we had no intention to fulfill that criterion with our study. More profound contextual insights and comparisons between organizational contexts are
hampered. Our interview process also denotes a limitation. For the sake of our study, the idealistic realization of our interviews would have been face-to-face meetings. We were only able to conduct one interview face-to-face, and the five others via Skype-meetings. Although we had visual eyesight; to perceive body language and idiosyncrasies as object of interpretation and analysis, the absence of physical presence might result in false inferences. Lastly, one palpable limitation is the nature of time. Our restrained schedule might have influenced the quality of certain aspects of our study, which qualifies it to be considered a limitation.

Furthermore, there are theoretical limitations to our study. We chose to adopt a knowledge-based view of the firm in our study, which implies the dismissal of else perspectives, e.g. resource-based view of the firm. Our choice impregnated the analysis and thus findings. Moreover, our choice of central theory, deliberate learning theory, infers limitations to our study. Our findings reflect the prism of interpretation and theoretical framework, which directly implies that other theoretical explanations might have interpreted our data differently. Although we have reviewed for our choices, future studies might take into consideration to adopt multiple theoretical angles – not selecting one to proceed with theory.

Concerning future research, we believe our thesis has identified at least two interesting topics for upcoming researchers to elaborate further. First, our empirical material provided a glance of the notion “clean team”, which we had not encountered before. Thus, clean teams could be conceptualized and further understood; how it works and implications following the deployment of such arrangement. Future studies could further develop the understanding of how clean teams might facilitate M&As, or impediments that prevail as a result. For instance, a quantitative study which investigates the outcome of an M&A with clean teams as one variable could potentially illuminate the role of a clean team.

Second, we believe future research could extend our study by adding case studies. In that way, cross-analysis can be made to see how organizations deliberately learn from their endeavors. Ideally, the study would embrace a multiple of industries together with respective cases, in order to extract findings that could be idiosyncratic to a specific industry. Additionally, the study might benefit from being longitudinal to its methodology. Learning outcomes could thus be better monitored if the stages before, during and subsequent are reviewed for. Based on the amplitude of named suggestions, there could be two studies, wherein one focuses on learning with a longer perspective, and another how industry-specifics affect learning.
8. References


**Books:**


## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Interview guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewer questions</th>
<th>Purpose/aim, and theoretical connection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for your time to meet us!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presentation of the thesis and the authors:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are we?</td>
<td>Welcome and inform the company represented about the study’s subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our study and past research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ1: How can learnings be captured from previous experience in integration after cross-border acquisitions?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ2: How can learnings from previous experience of cross-border acquisition integration be utilized in subsequent deals?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our purpose is to understand how learnings are drawn from previous experiences in cross-border acquisition integration, to later be utilized for integration of subsequent cross-border acquisitions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The interview procedure:</strong></td>
<td>Explain further her/his role as a respondent, and how the interview will go about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated to take around 60 minutes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contained of (24) open questions, which we will ask</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consent for:</strong></td>
<td>Inform the respondent about anonymity and confidentiality regarding the study and data from the interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only answer those questions you want and can</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidentially, which means that company names and respondent will of course be kept anonymous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Usage of data:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reclaimed data from the interview/s will remain confident by the anonymous criteria. The interview will be recorded some that we later can transcribe the data outcome</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background and M&amp;A history</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal information:</strong></td>
<td>Get a better insight on the person and the respondents role in the firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What is your role in the organizations M&amp;A process?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What is your experience with M&amp;As?</td>
<td>To get valuable background information about the context the firm operates in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Company information:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How many M&amp;A’s are made in the past?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post-merger integration phase</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What strategy have you chosen to integrate your acquired companies? (Why have you chosen this strategy? Culture, country, product etc.)</td>
<td>Understand measurement techniques (Teerikangas &amp; Very, 2006).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What is your image of the integration outcomes after integration?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What do you think was the key for integration? Follow-up question: If bad: What went wrong?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How do measure success or failure in your acquisitions?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. In what way do you link pre-merger phase to post-merger integration? (Or are they separated)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. What criteria need to be fulfilled in order for the acquisition to advance?
11. Is there any co-operation in the integration, or do your people handle the integration internally?

**Deliberate learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Research Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12. How do you evaluate your integration work?</td>
<td>Understand how the firm works with previous experiences and evaluate their previous performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. What are the specific techniques for evaluating?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. What role has previous experience in the integration work? (Both individual and organisational)</td>
<td>Understand how the firm establish and reconfigure their organizational routines (Felin et al., 2012; Feldman &amp; Pentland, 2003; Feldman &amp; Portland, 2003; Howards-Grenville, 2005).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. What happens after you consider the acquisition integrated? (General perception of time for integration)</td>
<td>Understand how the organization works post-integration phase to articulate important knowledge and how they store that knowledge by codification (Zollo &amp; Winter, 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Do you have any routines bound to post merger integration work?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up question: If yes: What are these routines? How did they arise? How do you improve them?</td>
<td>Understand the dissemination of knowledge (Kale &amp; Singh, 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. How do you transform your experience to the organisation? (e.g. Articulation and codification techniques / Evaluation group, database, consultants)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. How would you say you learn from these integration phases?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. How do you utilise your experience in subsequent integration? (Generalising knowledge, manager’s confidence, momentum from previous acquisition)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Are there any differences in learning depending on country?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. What is your general view of feedback/evaluation of the M&amp;A as a whole?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Is there any function working with M&amp;As? Or different people for different acquisitions?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. In what way is experience shared amongst the participants in the acquisition?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Have you noticed any development from the processes of knowledge articulation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Wrap-up**

Thank you very much for valuable insights for our study. Is that something you want to add or other questions?

**Following procedure:**

The next step for us in now to transcribe the interview/s and then get back to you for validity check!

Is it okay if we get back to you if some additional questions will arise?

Would you, when the thesis is finalized, receive an electronic-copy?
### Appendix 2 – Coding table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key words</th>
<th>Occurrence</th>
<th>Rank (Major, unique, leftover)</th>
<th>Code</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Unique</td>
<td>I1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-Border</td>
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<td>Leftover</td>
<td>CB1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing</td>
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<td>Leftover</td>
<td>T2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing environment</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Unique</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>S2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synergies</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>S1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Leftover</td>
<td>O1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>RS1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milestones</td>
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<td>M4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Branding</td>
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<td>B1</td>
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<td>Valuation</td>
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<td>Closeness</td>
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<td>C3</td>
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<td>Team</td>
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<td>Major</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement (Feedback, evaluation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business case</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meetings</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>M1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Leftover</td>
<td>P2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lessons Learned</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Unique</td>
<td>LL1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Unique</td>
<td>E1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>C1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning by doing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Unique</td>
<td>L1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>=215</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 3 – Coding themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-areas/Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M&amp;A integration Team</td>
<td>Teams (T1), Communication (C2), Experience (E1), Integration (I1), Clean-Room (CR1), Knowledge (K1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techniques for integration learning</td>
<td>Manuals (M1), Measurement (Evaluation, Feedback) (M2), Meetings (M3), Lessons-Learned (LL1), Workshops (W1), Process (PR1), Routines (RS2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration Strategy</td>
<td>Synergies (S1), Strategies (S2), Business-Case (BS1), Learning-By-Doing (L1), Ownership (O1), Valuation (V1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration Planning</td>
<td>Planning (P1), Resources (RS1), Changing Environment (CE1), Time-Frame (TF1), Milestones (M4), Timing (T2), Branding (B1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Learning</td>
<td>Culture (C1), Cross-Border (CB1), Closeness (C3), Fear (F1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>