Expatriate Leaders- Cultural chameleons or cultural contrarians?

a narrative study of Swedish leaders' adjustment process in France

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Acknowledgements

Now I finally get to write the last page of this thesis, a page that I sure have looked forward to for a long time now. This is the page of my study where I reflect upon the process that I have gone through so far, leading up to this very page. The page that you now read is also the page where I get to acknowledge, and thank, the people who have helped me in the making of this thesis.

First of all I would like to thank all the participating leaders for taking the time out of their busy schedules to participate in this thesis. Your experiences of the adjustment of your leadership behavior to the French context have been so insightful and valuable. To be able to take part of your experiences in France has been a very interesting and inspiring aspect of the making of this study.

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Abstract

Given that expatriates constitute both a key resource to their organization and a significant cost driver, scholars have given much attention to research on the topic of expatriation. A large part of these studies are devoted to the process of expatriate adjustment, which is argued to be the most important foundation to the rewards as well as costs of the expatriation to the individuals and their organizations (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005,p.257). The existing research on expatriate adjustment has tended to focus on how to optimize expatriate adjustment from an organization’s perspective. According to Osland (2000,p.227) little attention has been given to the subjective experience of the individual expatriate’s adjustment, the journey inward. After having conducted an extensive literature search I have found that this is still an unexplored field of research. Nevertheless, this less tangible and less researched, inward adjustment aspect of the expatriate leader’s experience should be especially interesting to prospecting expatriates who have never lived abroad. Better knowledge of what expatriates go through during the adjustment should be interesting also for scholars and organizations, since a better understanding of the adjustment process is likely to enable more suitable preparation and necessary support to the expatriated individual.

The main purpose of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of the subjective adjustment process of the expatriated leader, and to describe how the expatriate leader adjusts the leadership behavior to the host culture from an outward, as well as inward perspective. In order to do that I will study Swedish leaders’ experiences of the adjustment process that they go through when they expatriate to France. The approach taken in this study is that this increased understanding can be reached through the construction and analysis of narratives.

Having done my research I can practically provide Swedish leaders, who are considering relocating to France, obtain a more realistic idea of what to expect and benefit from the experience of those leaders who have gone before them. In order to better « fit in » in the French context, the Swedish leaders in this study have from an outward perspective adjusted their leadership behavior from: participative to autocratic and directive, from informal to formal and from considerate and personal to considerate and distant.

Having done my research I can theoretically contribute to a better understanding of the subjective adjustment process of the expatriated leader, from an inward perspective. Even if the most convenient, and least psychologically threatening, option for an expatriate leader would be to not adjust the own leadership behavior to the foreign culture at all, my research shows that this adjustment is necessary in order to be an effective leader in the host culture. However, a leader should not adjust the own leadership behavior to any extent, since it is important as a leader to not compromise with the own values and who he or she is as a person, to be able to stay trustworthy. The main issue with the adjustment of the leadership behavior from an inward perspective, which has been extensively highlighted in the expatriate literature, is that the leadership behavioral adjustment might challenge the own values and beliefs of the leader (Van Vianen et al, 2004,p.705f), which can make many individuals feel that they are questioning the own identity (Javidan et al, 2006,p.85). Having done my research I have not found support for that kind of psychological distress among the Swedish leaders when adjusting their behavior to better suit the French culture. The expatriate leaders have found the adjustment of their leadership behavior discouraging and draining at times, however, none of the respondent leaders have expressed that they have experienced personal difficulties in terms of questioned identity, when adjusting their leadership behavior to the French culture.
1. Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 6
   1.1 Problem background ......................................................................................................................... 6
   1.2 Problem ........................................................................................................................................ 7
   1.3 Purpose .......................................................................................................................................... 8
   1.4 Research questions ......................................................................................................................... 9
   1.5 Definitions ..................................................................................................................................... 9
   1.6 Disposition .................................................................................................................................... 9

2. Theory .................................................................................................................................................. 10
   2.1 Definition of leadership .................................................................................................................. 10
      2.1.1 Managers and leaders .............................................................................................................. 10
   2.2 Leadership behavior ...................................................................................................................... 11
      2.2.1 Classical leadership styles ...................................................................................................... 12
      2.2.2 Contemporary leadership styles ............................................................................................. 14
      2.2.3 New wave leadership styles .................................................................................................. 14
   2.3 Leadership Style ............................................................................................................................. 12
      2.3.1 Classical leadership styles ...................................................................................................... 12
      2.3.2 Contemporary leadership styles ............................................................................................. 14
      2.3.3 New wave leadership styles .................................................................................................. 14
   2.4 Situational influence on effective leadership behavior ................................................................. 15
      2.4.1 Possibility to adjust the leadership behavior ......................................................................... 15
      2.4.2 Desirability to adjust the leadership behavior ....................................................................... 16
      2.4.3 Situational factors ................................................................................................................ 16
   2.5 Culture .......................................................................................................................................... 18
      2.5.1 Dimensions of culture and leadership research .................................................................... 19
      2.5.2 Concluding reflections on culture dimensions ....................................................................... 23
      2.5.3 The Swedish leader ................................................................................................................ 23
      2.5.4 The French leader .................................................................................................................. 24
   2.6 Expectations and motives of expatriation ..................................................................................... 25
   2.7 Cultural adjustment ....................................................................................................................... 26
      2.7.1 Cross-cultural training (CCT) ................................................................................................. 26
      2.7.2 Difficulties in cultural adjustment .......................................................................................... 27
   2.8 Theoretical summary ..................................................................................................................... 28

3. Research design and method ............................................................................................................. 33
   3.1 Narrative research .......................................................................................................................... 33
      3.1.1 Limitations of narrative research .............................................................................................. 34
   3.2 Why a qualitative research method, such as narrative research? ................................................... 34
   3.3 Underlying assumptions in the qualitative research with a narrative approach ............................. 35
   3.4 Preconceptions ............................................................................................................................. 36
   3.5 The research process ..................................................................................................................... 36
      3.5.1 Finding the right sources ......................................................................................................... 36
      3.5.2 Finding the participants .......................................................................................................... 37
      3.5.3 Creating the interview guide .................................................................................................. 38
      3.5.4 Conducting the interviews ...................................................................................................... 39
   3.6 Analyzing the collected material .................................................................................................. 41
   3.7 Assessing the trustworthiness ....................................................................................................... 42

4. Narratives .......................................................................................................................................... 44
   4.1 Alan ................................................................................................................................................. 44
   4.2 Betty .............................................................................................................................................. 46
   4.3 Christian ....................................................................................................................................... 48
   4.4 David ............................................................................................................................................ 50
   4.5 Erica .............................................................................................................................................. 51
1. Introduction

In this chapter the background to the research problem will be presented, followed by an examination of the specific problem. Thereafter the purpose of this research will be revealed as well as the research questions that will help fulfill the purpose.

1.1 Problem background

Today's rapidly changing, highly competitive global business environment has led to the growing importance of international human resource management. In the competition for new markets, technologies, products and investors, as well as the best talents, more and more global organizations chose to send employees on international assignments. These employees are in the literature commonly referred to as expatriates, which can be defined as employees who are sent from a parent organization to live and work in another country for a longer period of time (Caligiuri, 2000,p.62). There are several reasons to why organizations chose to send some of their best employees abroad. Organizations often place a strategic importance on international assignments and expatriates are appointed to develop new markets abroad or to manage foreign subsidiaries (Harzing, 2001,p.373). Other reasons to send employees abroad include the transfer of technologies or the development of international skills and knowledge to the workforce (Bennett et al., 2000,p.239).

While international assignments can be very advantageous for an organization, their use is not without costs. It has been estimated that the first year costs of solely sending an expatriate on an international assignment are at least three times the base salary of the same employee in the home country (Shaffer et al., 1999,p.557; Black & Gregersen, 1999,p.53). In addition, the failure of such an international assignment is associated with even more significant costs. The replacement cost of an expatriate manager because of premature departure is substantial as it often covers costs for training, costs for relocation and costs for compensation (Shaffer et al., 2006,p.109). Expatriate failure can also lead to possible indirect costs such as employee loss of personal self-esteem, self-confidence or motivation (Puck et al., 2008,p.2182). On an overall level, expatriate failure could have devastating consequences for the organization, such as impeding the performance of foreign subsidiaries or lead to lost opportunities in creating or penetrating new markets.

Given that expatriates constitute both a key resource to their organization and a significant cost driver, scholars have given much attention to research on the topic of expatriation. A large part of these studies are devoted to the process of expatriate adjustment, which is argued to be the most important foundation to the rewards as well as costs of the expatriation to the individuals and their organizations (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005,p.257). Expatriate adjustment can be defined as the degree of psychological adjustment and comfort that the individual experiences within a new environment (Black & Mendenhall, 1990,p.118). The best known theoretical model of expatriates’ adjustment has been developed by Black and Stephens. The adjustment that the expatriate goes through has been conceptualized to concern three facets; the expatriate’s psychological comfort with the general living conditions and culture of the host country, the expatriate’s psychological comfort with the work task and conditions of the international assignment, and the expatriate’s psychological comfort with interacting with the host country nationals (Black, 1988,p.279f;Black & Stephens, 1989,p.535).
The third facet of the expatriate’s adjustment, the interaction with host country nationals, is something that leaders in particular should be aware of. In addition to the more general aspects of the expatriate adjustment, such as the living condition in the host country, the expatriated leader will also have to deal with the host country subordinates. Leaders are often the specifically chosen key person sent on an international assignment (Kamoche, 1997,p.214) and the relationship between leader and follower can be especially challenging in a new culture. Van de Vliert & Smith (2004,p.381f) argue that the shaping and maintenance of superior-subordinate relationships are extra important for expatriate leaders due to the contingencies that must be taken into account. For instance, the host country subordinates could have specific expectations on their leader and consequently the host subordinates might not at all be in favor of a new leader with a different leadership style and behavior. If a foreign leader does not behave according to the expectations of the host country subordinates, it may cause conflicts or decrease the efficiency in the work group.

Early & Peterson (2004,p.109) state that “adopting the behaviors consistent with a target culture is an important aspect of intercultural adjustment and interaction”. Similarly, Black & Mendelhall (1990,p.124) describe the adjustment to a new culture to involve the knowledge of which behavior to execute or suppress in different situations. Studies have further shown that a country’s culture help to explain leadership behavior (Smith et al., 2002,p.202), and in order to adjust one’s leadership behavior accurately to the host culture, it is important to understand the host culture.

Hofstede’s power distance is a culture dimension that helps describe differences in value perspectives between national cultures, and which research identifies as highly influential on the concept of leadership in different cultures (Dickson et al., 2003,p.740). Two extreme opposites on the power distance scale are European countries Sweden and France, who provides an interesting environment for further investigation. In Sweden, where the power distance is among the lowest in the world, the emphasis on equality is strong, whereas in France, where the power distance instead is very high, the power tends to be centralized to the leader alone (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005,p.56ff). If an expatriated leader from either one of these two countries makes decisions in the host country, based on how he or she operates in the home country, the chances are that the leader would face some serious challenges or make some very bad decisions.

1.2 Problem

It is in the literature argued that the adjustment process of an expatriate involves more than learning culturally appropriate behaviors, as individuals also use their own internal standards to chose or evaluate behaviors (Beach & Mitchell,1996,p.2ff). When interacting with the host country subordinates, the expatriate leader is likely to encounter challenges to his or her own values, beliefs and behavioral norms (Van Vianen et al., 2004,p.705f; Molinsky, 2007,p.629). According to the Project GLOBE scholars “the dexterity to adjust one’s behavior is a critical requirement. Not everyone can do this; to many people it may bring into question one’s own identity” (Javidan et al., 2006,p.85). In other words, the expatriate leader must behave according to host country norms, while also behaving in a way that is not potentially in conflict with the own personal values. The expatriate’s balance between host and home culture has been identified in the expatriate literature as an outcome that indicates good adjustment (Sanchez et al., 2000,p.101; Berry, 1997,p.13). However, there is no specific theory that addresses how to adjust or how this balancing act happens or fails to happen during the relocation (Maertz et al., 2009,p.66).
In the early nineties authors Searle, Ward and Kennedy pointed out the distinction between socio-cultural and psychological adjustment in cross-cultural adjustment (see Searle & Ward, 1990, Ward & Searle, 1991, Ward & Searle, 1992). The socio-cultural adjustment deals with interactive aspects of the new culture and the expatriate’s ability to “fit in”, whereas the psychological adjustment relates to the psychological, or emotional well-being of the expatriate during the adjustment (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999,p.424). Other authors have used this distinction in publications on cultural adjustment since, and some authors have turned their focus also to the psychological adjustment that an expatriate goes through. However, the existing research on expatriate adjustment has tended to focus on how to optimize expatriate adjustment from an organization’s perspective. According to Osland (2000,p.227) little attention has been given to the subjective experience of the individual expatriate’s adjustment, the journey inward. After having conducted an extensive literature search I have found that this is still an unexplored field of research.

Nevertheless, this less tangible and less researched, inward adjustment aspect of the expatriate leader’s experience should be especially interesting to prospecting expatriates who have never lived abroad. Better knowledge of what expatriates go through during the adjustment should be interesting also for scholars and organizations, since a better understanding of the adjustment process is likely to enable more suitable preparation and necessary support to the expatriated. It is clear that there is a gap in the existing literature on expatriate adjustment with regard to the outward, in combination with the inward, experience of the individual.

I think that more academic attention should be given to better understand the adjustment process of expatriated leaders, both in terms of outward adjustment and how to fit in, as well as the inward aspect of the adjustment and what the individual go through during the adjustment.

1.3 Purpose

The main purpose of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of the subjective adjustment process of the expatriated leader, and to describe how the expatriate leader adjusts the leadership behavior to the host culture from an outward, as well as inward perspective. In order to do that I will study Swedish leaders’ experiences of the adjustment process that they go through when they expatriate to France.

With this study I will on one hand practically contribute to the, in my opinion, very limited research on how Swedish leaders who relocate to France adjust his or her leadership behavior according to the specific cultural differences that exists between Sweden and France, in order to fit in. There are many Swedish leaders who relocate to France every year and I hope that this study will allow me to help Swedish leaders, who are considering relocating to France, obtain a more realistic idea of what to expect and benefit from the experience of those leaders who have gone before them.

The first part of the study is important in order to increase the understanding of the adjustment process that the Swedish leader goes through. Access to the Swedish leaders experiences and reflections on how they have adjusted their leadership behavior to better suit the French context will be an important foundation for the second part of the study.

With this study I will also more generally contribute to the limited theory on expatriated leaders’ subjective, inward adjustment, which deals with underlying issues with the
adjustment process. Given that behavioral adjustment can be psychologically challenging for the individual leader, I would like to further elucidate the desirability and possibility to adjust one’s leadership behavior as well as the negative consequences it can have on the individual leader’s well-being.

1.4 Research questions

What expectations did Swedish leaders have on the expatriation and adjustment process before departure?

How do Swedish leaders experience that their leadership behavior should be adjusted to the French context, from an outward as well as inward perspective?

The intent with these research questions is to gain an increased understanding of the leader’s expatriation experience and the adjustment process as a whole. These research questions will be further developed and specified in the theory chapter. The approach taken in this study is that this increased understanding can be reached through the construction and analysis of narratives.

1.5 Definitions

Adjustment of the leadership behavior from an:

*Outward perspective*

The adjustment of the leadership behavior from an outward perspective refers to the external aspect of the adjustment process that the expatriate leader goes through. Like socio-cultural adjustment, an outward perspective of the adjustment is concerned with the expatriate’s ability to “fit in”.

*Inward perspective*

The adjustment of the leadership behavior from an inward perspective refers to the internal aspect of the adjustment process that the expatriate leader goes through. Like psychological adjustment, an inward perspective of the adjustment is concerned with the emotional well-being of the expatriate leader during the adjustment.

1.6 Disposition

I will here, inspired by Czarniawska (2004, p. 124) present the structure of this thesis.

Chapter 1: There is something strange going on… (Introduction)
Chapter 2: Has somebody else explained it? (Theoretical chapter)
Chapter 3: I’d better go and learn more about it. But how? (Method chapter)
Chapter 4: Now that I have been told it, I will try to explain it to others. So, let me tell you a story… (Narratives)
Chapter 5: Now, what does it remind me of? Is there someone else who thinks similarly? (Analysis)
Chapter 6: This is the end (and the point) of my story (Conclusion)
2. Theory

In order to understand how Swedish leaders adjust their behavior in the cultural context of France it is important to explore different theories and approaches of leadership: whether it is possible and desirable to adjust one’s leadership; the effect that culture has on leadership and finally adjustment to another culture. These theories and approaches will constitute the theoretical framework that will be brought along in order to perform the research.

This study is about leadership behavior since its purpose is to contribute to a better understanding of the subjective adjustment process of the expatriated leader, and to describe how the expatriate leader should adjust the leadership behavior to the host culture from an outward, as well as inward perspective. In order to understand leadership behavior and provide a larger picture for the reader it is necessary to start off this chapter with a broader presentation of leadership.

2.1 Definition of leadership

In order to discuss leadership in this study it is first and foremost important to identify what it means to be a leader. Despite the thousands of articles and books that are written on the subject of leadership, there is no generally accepted definition of what leadership is. As a consequence, the number of definitions of leadership is almost as numerous as the authors who have attempted to define the concept of it. The majority of the definitions of leadership do reflect the assumption that leadership involves a process where an individual has intentionally exerted influence over other people in order to get them to do something (Kort, 2008, p.409). House and colleagues developed a definition of leadership at the first project GLOBE conference, in order to better understand the project and its concept of leadership. This definition refers to organizational leadership rather than leadership in general and it is also the view of leadership that I choose to adopt for this study:

Leadership is “the ability of an individual to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute towards the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members” (House et al., 2002, p.5)

2.1.1 Managers and leaders

The essence of leadership is often discussed through the differentiation between leaders and managers, and numerous scholars have over the years distinguished leaders from managers (Zaleznik, 1977; Kotter, 1990; Bertoccio, 2009). For example, according to Kotter (1990, p.4) a manager deals mainly with planning and budgeting, organizing and staffing, controlling and monitoring while a leader is more establishing a sense of direction by developing a vision of the future as well as motivates and inspires the employees to create commitment to goals. Other researchers are less sure of whether the distinction between managers and leaders is really fruitful, and question if the distinction brings more damage than value to the knowledge of organizations, and how individuals coordinate their actions (Strannegård & Jönsson, 2009, p.23). In contemporary organizations it is also rare that the activities of leaders and managers are not integrated and thus it is difficult to distinguish leadership from management in practice (Sveninson, Alvesson & Kärreman, 2009, p.36). The concepts of leader and manager are often used interchangeably within organizational studies, also when it comes to cultural adjustment for expatriate leaders. In this study the difference between the concepts of leaders and managers is recognized, however, they will be used interchangeably in a wish to
not exclude existing research as a consequence of definition. The focus in this study is on leaders with a management position.

Several researchers have categorized the development of leadership studies over the years (see Grint, 1997; Bryman, 1996). One of the earliest approaches to leadership was the trait approach, which emphasized the leader’s character and attributes, suggesting that leaders were born rather than made (Strannegård & Jönsson, 2009, p. 17). The trait approach to leadership wished to specify desirable leadership attributes, however, despite the many studies on the area it has been difficult to find a perfect relationship between specific attributes and effective leadership (Schmid, 2006, p. 180). As it became apparent that effective leaders did not seem to have any distinguishing traits, another method arose, which instead tried to isolate the behavioral characteristics of effective leaders (Cheung et al., 2001, p. 422). The leader’s behavior and its influence on the organization and its members is an approach to leadership that is relevant for my study as I wish to contribute to how leaders should adjust their leadership behavior to a new culture.

2.2 Leadership behavior

Making research about leadership behaviors began in the late 1940s and early 1950s with the Ohio state studies and the Michigan leadership studies. These two groups of studies arrived at similar conclusion as they split behavioral styles into the concern with the task side of management and the human side of management. (Pearce, 2003, p. 275ff). Although leadership theory has since developed beyond the two dimensional model of task and relational-oriented behavior, it does not mean that this framework is outdated. Instead the task-related versus relationship-related classification to understand leadership behavior is considered among the most robust leadership concepts, (Euwena et al., 2007, p. 1038) and is advocated to be included as leadership styles in more modern research (Judge et al., 2004, p. 47).

Task-oriented behavior, which is also called structure- or production-oriented behavior, includes all behaviors that seek to improve the compliance of tasks (Arvonen & Ekvall 1999, p. 245). The behavior of a task-oriented leader encompass planning and organizing of activities, explaining and clarification of specific rules and expected results as well as directing activities and monitoring performances (Casimir & Keith Ng, 2010, p. 502). Relationship-oriented behavior, which is also called people- or employee-oriented behavior, instead emphasizes the relation of the effective leader toward the subordinates (Arvonen & Ekvall 1999, p. 245). The behavior of a relation-oriented leader includes encouraging and expressing confidence that a person can perform a difficult task, socializing with people to build relationships, recognizing accomplishments and offering support (Casimir & Keith Ng, 2010, p. 502). Because the task and relationship-related approaches to leadership behavior are two relatively independent dimensions, the behavior of a leader could be described as a combination of both (Yammarino et al., 2005, p. 888).

In this study leadership behavior will be further studied in terms of leadership style, as it is the goal to study the adjustment, and therefore the deviation, from the leader’s typical behavior that might be necessary when the leader move to a new culture. Therefore it should be more appropriate for this work to study leadership behavior in terms of a more consistent pattern of behavior that the style approach provide, in order to better detect any necessary adjustments. In order to investigate how leaders should adjust their leadership behavior to a new culture, it will first be investigated whether it is possible to identify specific leadership styles.
2.3 Leadership Style

A leader’s combination of attitudes and behaviors leads to a certain regularity and predictability when it comes to influencing the activities of people. This relatively consistent pattern of behavior that can therefore characterize a leader is called leadership style, and is thus an extension of understanding leadership behaviors and attitudes (Casimir, 2001, p.246). The style approach to leadership is not a sophisticated theory that precisely provides recommendations of effective leadership behavior. The style approach rather provides a framework for assessing leadership in a much broader manner, in terms of how the leader behave and act towards the subordinates.

Prior to conducting the interviews it is not possible for me to know how the respondents would describe their leadership style before and during the international assignment in France, and thus their adjustment process in terms of their leadership in a new country. Over the years researches have identified numerous leadership styles and it is not possible for me to describe them all. Therefore, in this study I have chosen to include some of the leadership styles that reflect the development and variety in the literature on leadership in major publications. Inspired by Yammarino et al. (2005, p.888) the approaches to leadership styles will be presented in the following order: classical leadership styles, contemporary leadership styles and new wave leadership styles, as can be seen in figure 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classical leadership styles</th>
<th>Contemporary leadership styles</th>
<th>New wave leadership styles</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Directive leadership</td>
<td>Transformational leadership</td>
<td>Shared leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive leadership</td>
<td>Transactional leadership</td>
<td>Individualized leadership</td>
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<td>Autocratic leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participative leadership</td>
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Figure 1: Different approaches to leadership styles

There are three rather different views on leaders that emerge from the classical, contemporary and new wave approaches to leadership styles. Throughout these presented leadership styles the focus moves from the differences between leaders, to differences within leaders and the distinction they make among their subordinates, and finally towards the differences in leader-subordinate relationship. I would like to remind the reader that the selection of the introduced leadership styles is not necessarily representative of the respondents, but I wanted to include a broader spectrum of leadership styles in order to provide the reader with a frame of reference for the empirical chapter.

2.3.1 Classical leadership styles

The classical leadership styles are founded on the opposing approaches of task and relationship-oriented behavior. Throughout the literature there are many definitions of the leadership styles that are dealing with task accomplishment and relationship- building
respectively. I have chosen to present these two opposing approaches as the following leadership styles:

a) Directive leadership

Directive leaders can be defined as very task-oriented, with a strong focus on targets, close supervision and control of subordinate action (Euwema et al., 2007, p.1038). A directive leadership style describes a leadership that primarily relies on position power, and representative behaviors of the directive leader include issuing instructions and commands as well as assigning goals to the subordinates (Pearce & Sims, 2002, p.173f).

b) Supportive leadership

A supportive leadership style implies that the leader’s focus is not on “leading” organizations, but on leading people, and this through interpersonal communication and interaction with the subordinates (Zander & Romani, 2004, p.297). Supportive leadership is defined to include sensitivity to group and individual needs, care for group tensions and focus on harmonic relations in the workplace (Euwema et al., 2007, p.1039). The key characteristics of a supportive leader is the consideration the leader show each subordinate, which implies trust, respect and open communication in the relationship between the leader and the led (Rowold, 2011, p.630).

c) Autocratic leadership

Leaders with an autocratic leadership style are strongly advocating their own solutions over all others (Peterson, 1997, p.1108). The autocratic leadership style is a leadership style that does not provide much room for the subordinates or group members to discuss and think about their own ideas. Instead, autocratic leaders push their own ideas and opinions during discussions, which tend to lead to decisions without giving much voice, control or respect to others. (De Cremer, 2006, p.82) The autocratic leader is considered very task-oriented since he or she is mainly focused on getting tasks accomplished while not being too concerned with whether the group members agree or not with the decision made along the way.

d) Participative leadership

The participative leadership style refers to leaders who deliberately seek and make use of employees input in making decisions (Srivastava et al., 2006, p.1241). Participative leaders both expect and encourage subordinates to express their opinions and ideas concerning issues at stake and they provide their subordinates with channels to make their voices heard (Gao et al., 2011, p.790). For a leader to welcome ideas from below is a generally accepted leadership approach in most contemporary organizations since workers close to the market and customers often provide useful inputs for leaders. DuBrin (2010, p.114f) distinguish between two types of participative leadership: The consultative leader asks for group members opinions before making a decision even if the leader retain the authority to make a decision. The consensus leader will encourage group discussion in a matter and later make a decision that not only reflect the general agreement of the group but also a decision that the group members will support. For a consensus leader all the people who will be involved in the consequences of a decision should also be able to provide an input for the decision.
Although the task-related versus relationship-related classification to understand leadership styles remains a useful framework today, the style approach to leadership has been further developed over the years. Other factors have been taken into consideration in the development of leadership styles and therefore additional leadership styles will now be presented that represent the shift towards a more contemporary approach to leadership styles.

2.3.2 Contemporary leadership styles

The main additional contribution of the contemporary approach to leadership styles is that it provides a more explicit focus on both the leaders and the development of their followers (Dansereau et al., 1995,p.253).

a) Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership is one of the most widely researched paradigms within the leadership field and it has found wide support in the literature, including support for outcomes such as leader performance and effectiveness (Judge & Piccolo;2004,p.762) as well as follower satisfaction and motivation. Transformational leaders act as mentors to their subordinates and have the ability to encourage and inspire their subordinates to accomplish even greater results through internal rewards such as individual development (Harms & Credè, 2010,p.6). Representative behavior of a transformational leader includes providing a vision, using inspirational communication and challenging the status quo (Pearce & Sims, 2002,p.175).

b) Transactional leadership

The transactional leader operates according to personal and material exchange principles with their followers (Pearce & Sims, 2002,p.174). The leader clarifies goals and expectations to the subordinates, as well as establishing the rewards for meeting these expectations (Judge & Piccolo, 2004,p.755). The leader avoids intervening and let the subordinates accomplish the task on their own, unless the expected results are not being achieved, which is why transactional leadership is also referred to as management by exception. The leader can intervene through either active or passive management by exception, dependent on the timing on the leaders intervention. An active leader monitor subordinates for mistakes and tries to correct them whereas a passive leader waits for subordinates mistakes before acting to correct them (Harms & Credè, 2010,p.6). Transformational leadership has been found to increase subordinates motivation more than transactional leadership, but leaders who are effective use a combination of both these types of leadership (Yukl,2010,p.277).

2.3.3 New wave leadership styles

The leadership styles presented in this section provides more recent and different perspectives of leadership styles that can be analyzed from a multiple level perspective.

a) Shared leadership

Shared leadership can be defined as a simultaneous, mutual influence process within a team that is characterized by the continuous emergence of official as well as unofficial leaders (Pearce, 2004,p.48). Shared leadership thus implies that leaders should seek to share power and influence among a set of individuals rather than to centralize it to his, or her, own hands.
Researchers have argued that today’s dynamic, knowledge-based organizations require an alternative view on leadership than a larger-than-life leader, who can inspire and single-handedly positively transform both processes and the people who work in them (Pearce & Manz, 2002, p.132). The objective of shared leadership is that the leader and followers lead one another towards the achievement of collective goals (Pearce et al., 2009, p.234).

b) Individualized leadership

Individualized leadership emphasizes the interpersonal aspect of superior-subordinate duos and therefore allows leaders to form unique, independent and balanced one-to-one relationships with each of their subordinates in a distinct duo (Wallis et al., 2011, p.185). In the balanced duos the giving and receiving for each party is equal, which can be accomplished by a leader providing attention, support and assurance to a subordinate whereas a subordinate is providing exceptional performance to the leader (Yammarino & Dansereau, 2002, p.90).

As can be seen in this section, the leadership literature identifies many different leadership styles. One of the strengths with the style approach to leadership is that it reminds the leaders that their actions towards other people occur on different levels and that the key to being an effective leader is often to find a balance between the different leadership behaviors (Northouse, 2010, p.77). For this specific study the style approach to leadership not only helps to describe the major components of a leader’s behavior but also provide a first glimpse of the notion that some situations and subordinates require the leader to adjust his or her behavior in order to be a more effective leader.

2.4 Situational influence on effective leadership behavior

The situation is very important when it comes to what leadership behavior or style that a leader emphasizes. A theory that explains leadership effectiveness in terms of situational moderator variables is also called the contingency theories of leadership (Amagoh, 2009, p.995). The essence of a contingency approach to leadership is that when leaders make their behavior contingent on situational forces, then their leadership is the most effective (DuBrin, 2010, p.133). Effective leaders will thus be the leaders who are able to adjust their behaviors and styles appropriate for the situation. In the contingency approach of leadership, the context demands different types of leadership styles. The main contribution of the contingency approach to the already presented style approach for this study is that it increases the understanding of the fact that the individual leader is believed to possess a larger repertoire of styles that he or she can use. The leader can simply adjust his or her behavior to better suit different contexts. In other words, the contingency approach is constituted on a more flexible view of leadership behavior.

Before examining the adjustment of the leadership behavior or style more in details, a few additional views on behavioral adjustment will be presented.

2.4.1 Possibility to adjust the leadership behavior

When it comes to changing leadership behaviors it is clear that the contingency approach to leadership holds that it is possible and encouraged to adjust one’s leadership behavior according to situational factors. However, one of the most well known scholars within the contingency theories, Fred E Fiedler, has a different view on how the best leadership style is determined by the situation in which the leader is working. According to Fiedler, leadership
style is a relatively permanent aspect of the leader’s behavior and the style is therefore difficult to modify (Fiedler, 1965, p.115; Vroom & Jago, 2007, p.20). Instead Fiedler believes that once leaders have identified and understand their leadership style, the leaders should work in situations that match their particular styles (DuBrin, 2010, p.135).

Although Fiedler’s view on the contingency approach to leadership might sound complicated and difficult for companies to manage in practice, he presents a view of leadership adjustment that is worth thinking about. If leader behavior is part of leaders personality and who they are, how easy it then is to change one’s behavior or is it even something that is desirable?

2.4.2 Desirability to adjust the leadership behavior

Another view on adjusting leadership behavior that contributes and brings clarity to Fiedler’s worth considering thoughts is the concept of authentic leadership. Authentic leadership highlights the importance of being your own person and staying true to your own values (Michie & Gooty, 2005, p.448; Harter, 2002, p.382). In order to be authentic the leader must develop his or her own leadership style, which should be consistent with the individual’s personality and character (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p.320). However, to be effective in today’s fast changing and highly competitive environment, it is also important that leaders are able to adapt their leadership style to fit occurring situations. A leadership style is dependent on the context in which leaders arise, in the settings in which they function, and in the context leaders shape and are shaped (Gardner et al., 2005, p.345). There are times when a leader must be inspiring and motivating and there are times when the leader should rather be tough on his or her decisions. That a leader adapts his or her leadership is not the same as being unauthentic and it is very different from playing a role. Instead good leaders today know when and how to adjust their style to the demands of specific situations. (George, 2003, p.14)

An authentic leader’s personal values are shaped through personal beliefs as well as a lifetime of experience. Only in challenging situations will a leader learn how to cope with the pressure of compromising the own values and deal with potential conflicts between them. It is not easy for the leader to deal with those situations but nonetheless; it is in these situations that the leader realizes his or her true values. (George, 2003, p.37f).

The concept of authentic leadership contributes with clarity to the question on the desirability to adjust one’s leadership behavior by explaining that the adjustment of the leadership behavior is desirable to a certain extent, but however, that one cannot adjust to any extent, or else one’s leadership will not be trustworthy.

The behavioral and style approach to leadership have been helpful in shedding some lights on how leaders should adjust their leadership to a different cultural context. However, since the behavioral or style approach to leadership, at least the founding task and relationship-oriented one, ignores the influence of employees and other situational variables, Yukl (2010, p.456) explains that this approach is too simplistic on its own to explain leader behavior in a culturally different context. Having considered the recently presented, broader perspectives on adjusted leadership, the situational factors that are known to affect how leaders adjust their leadership behavior will now be further examined.

2.4.3 Situational factors

Subordinates
Perhaps the most well-known model on situational leadership is a model by Hersey and Blanchard. Their situational leadership theory model suggests that effective leadership occur on the basis of the relationship between a leader and a subordinate on a given task. The model suggests that there is no leadership style that fits all purposes and in order to be successful the leader has to adopt his or her behavior to meet the demands of the environment (Hersey & Blanchard, 1981, p. 38). Therefore, effective leadership depends on a combination of both task and relationship-oriented behaviors, based on the maturity of the subordinates. In other words, the leader is required to use the leadership style that best matches the readiness, ability and willingness of subordinates to accomplish a particular task (Chen & Silverthorne, 2005, p. 281). The contribution of the situational leadership model for this study is that it adds a means of thinking about leadership behavior in relation to group members. The model can thus be beneficial by diagnosing the readiness of group members before choosing the right leadership style.

There are many factors that could affect which leadership style that could be appropriate in different situations, and when working with different people. Although the situational leadership model has been praised for taking the subordinates into consideration when adapting an appropriate leadership style, it has also been criticized for ignoring other factors concerning the subordinate as an individual. For example certain demographics can also influence the leader-subordinate relationship and the type of leadership style subordinates require or prefer. A study by Vecchio and Boatwright (2002, p. 337f) showed that the level of education and job experience of the subordinates were inversely related to directive leadership and were not related to supportive leadership; employees with more work experience and more education desired less structure. Another interesting finding was that age on the other hand was positively related to desire for structure. The older employees desired more structure than the younger employees did. Other findings indicated that female and male employees had different preference for styles of leadership. Female employees expressed a stronger preference for supportive leadership, whereas male employees had a stronger desire for directive leadership. Consequently, these findings indicate that demographic characteristics may affect employees’ preference for a particular leadership style and these characteristics are not considered in the situational leadership model.

**Situations**

From previous paragraphs it is clear that a leader might have to adjust his or her leadership after the differences of the subordinates. People are different and have different needs. The different needs of the subordinates can also be further affected by certain events that can occur, which are likely to require the leader to adjust his or her leadership. One such event that might require the leader to adjust his or her behavior is a crisis. Different people react in different ways to a crisis but a crisis is likely to significantly increase the stress among the group members and therefore a crisis demands a leadership behavior that will help reduce the immediate impact of a crisis on the subordinates. An ignored crisis situation could lead to significant human and financial costs for the organization as the result of a crisis include absenteeism, turnover, negative impacts on people’s morale and reduction in employee productivity (Barton, 1994, p. 19).

There are of course also many other situational variables that could affect leadership behavior. Some examples include the type of organization the leader is working for (e.g., profit or nonprofit organization, corporation or private ownership), the type of industry the leader is working in (e.g., retailing, financial services, telecommunications, manufacturing,
etc.), and the characteristics of the managerial position (e.g., the level and function of the manager, authority and position power) (Yukl, 2010, p. 456). The situational variables that could affect leadership behavior will also be further examined in terms of situations with culturally different norms under 2.7 Cultural Adjustment, later in this chapter.

The characteristics of the position that the leader is offered through the foreign assignment depend on the leadership culture that exists within the organization. Which type of leadership culture that exists within an organization can depend on different factors but the national culture of the organization’s host country is likely to be one of them. The national culture is a situational factor, which may affect leadership behavior and which is most significant for the purpose of this study. Even though culture is the one situational factor that will be introduced more thoroughly in this study, it is difficult to put the finger on what exactly causes leaders to change their behavior. The previous paragraphs were an attempt to highlight the fact that a variety of factors could in fact affect leadership behavior. Therefore, it felt important for the sake of the reader and the credibility of this study, to highlight this fact before moving on to first introduce culture in a more general manner, and then more thoroughly study how culture, in particular Swedish and French cultures respectively, might affect leader behavior.

2.5 Culture

The concept of culture is almost as old as civilization itself and the attempts to definition of the concept are many. In 1945 Ralph Linton came up with what seems to be a timeless definition of culture:

Culture is “the configuration of learned behavior and results of behavior whose component elements are shared and transmitted to the members of a particular society” (Linton, 1945, p. 32)

Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, p. 17f) similarly refer to culture as the software of the mind, which differentiate the people that belong to a certain group or category from others. Culture can be considered as mental programming since the head of each human being is filled with thoughts, emotions and behaviors created from experiences. Culture is thus something that people are not born with but instead something we learn. The programming is the most effective when people are young since the behavioral patterns learnt during the childhood are the patterns the most difficult to change over time. According to Schein (1985), culture exists simultaneously on three different levels in a society. On the surface are the artifacts; underneath the artifacts are our values; and underneath our values are our basic assumptions. The basic assumptions represent our taken-for-granted beliefs about reality and human nature. Values consist of our social principles, goals, philosophies and standards, which are considered to have intrinsic worth. The artifacts of a culture are the visible, tangible and audible results of activities grounded in our values and assumptions. (Schein, 1985, cited in Hatch, 1993, p. 659) There are many different types of culture such as national culture, regional culture, gender culture and generation culture. The national culture is the culture that distinguishes the habitants of one country from the habitants of another country. A national culture is often very complex and it is difficult to create an understanding for a national culture that is not one’s own. Therefore, it can also be difficult to explain one’s own culture to others, since actions and behavior often occur without any further reflection. (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 17f)
One way to approach culture for this study is through the identification and measurement of dimensions of culture, and relating such culture dimensions to leadership. In the following section examples of studies that clarify the meaning of cultural dimensions will first be presented, before moving on to introduce examples that are more explicitly related to leadership, in a Swedish and French cultural context respectively.

2.5.1 Dimensions of culture and leadership research

The most recognized (and the most criticized) culture dimensions are undoubtedly the ones developed by Hofstede. Hofstede’s original study was based on a survey among managers and employees at IBM in more than 40 countries, and more previous research includes additional countries and different samples. Hofstede initially found four culture dimensions (power distance; individualism-collectivism; masculinity-femininity; uncertainty avoidance) and in later research, a fifth culture dimension (future orientation) was added. (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 11ff) Other culture dimension frameworks include those of Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1997), Schwartz (1999) as well as those developed in the project GLOBE study (e.g., House, Hanges & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1997) The "Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness" (GLOBE) Research Program is a more recent study which was envisioned in 1991 by Robert J. House. In 2004, the first volume of "Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies" was published. It was based on results from about 17,300 middle managers from 951 organizations in the food processing, financial services, and telecommunications services industries. In 2007 “Culture and Leadership across the World: The GLOBE Book of In-Depth Studies of 25 Societies" was published to complement the findings from the first volume. The GLOBE study builds on the findings from Hofstede among other scholars and to a great extent the findings are still similar to Hofstede’s cultural dimensions.

When presenting the relationship between culture dimensions and leadership, this study will first and foremost focus on the dimensions presented by Hofstede as these dimensions have most extensively been studied to this date. Other studies will however also be referred to when appropriate. I would like to highlight the fact that Hofstede’s studies have received substantial criticism. For example, some critics find that Hofstede’s work present an overly simplistic conceptualization of culture, that the initial sample only represented a single multinational company and that Hofstede’s culture dimensions are suggested to be static and thus not something that change over time (Sivakumar & Nakata, 2001, p. 557) Hofstede & Hofstede (2005, p. 26) respond to some of this criticism by stating that the cultural changes that do occur over time are superficial and that there is no support for the questions on whether the core values of today’s generations in different countries are converging. I think that although consisting of cultural stereotypes, Hofstede’s culture dimensions can be useful tools to help explaining cultural differences in leadership behaviors in this study. Hofstede’s culture dimensions, as well as the other culture dimensions frameworks used in this study, provide a reference point from which I can start to make sense of the behavior of Swedish leaders in France. At the same time I recognize that the culture dimension framework provide me with stereotypes and that no leader or subordinate in either Sweden or France will fit this reference point perfectly, since they are all individuals. I will return to the subject of limitations with the culture dimensions framework later in this section.

In the following section studies that link Hofstede’s culture dimension to leadership will be introduced. Thereafter Hofstede’s cultural dimensions will be more specifically presented, in terms of a Swedish and French perspective respectively. More attention will be given to the
cultural dimensions in which Sweden and France are significantly different and that thus are more likely to have an impact on leadership in respective country. It seems reasonable to believe that the cultural dissimilarities, and not the cultural similarities, are of more relevance for the leader’s behavior in a foreign country, since the similarities could be taken for granted whereas the dissimilarities are likely to create challenges.

a) Power distance

Power distance illustrates on what level the habitants of a country accept that the power is unequally divided within organizations and institutions. In countries with low power distance the habitants are expecting an equal division of power whereas in countries with high power distance there is instead an accepted hierarchy where all members have their given position. (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005,p.59). In other words, in cultures with large differences between individuals, organizations can be expected to have more layers and the chain of command to be considered important. In line with Hofstede, Schwartz (1999,p.27f) differentiate between hierarchical and egalitarian cultures. In a hierarchical culture, the chain of authority is emphasized and an unequal distribution of status and power is legitimate as well as expected. In such a culture, employees will comply with directives without questioning them. In a egalitarian culture on the other hand, individuals are encouraged to view each other as moral equals and employees typically have their saying in decisions affecting them (Den Hartog & Dickson, 2004,p.261)

The leadership role is often associated with status and power and it is therefore understandable that the distribution of power and status should be relevant to the leadership role. Power distance is also directly related to the subordinates. Subordinates in a high power distance culture are more reluctant to challenge their supervisors and more afraid to express disagreement with their supervisors (Adsit et al., 1997,p.394). Power distance has furthermore been found to have an impact on subordinates’ expectations and preferences regarding leadership. For instance, a high power distance culture is more likely to reflect a less negative attitude to authoritarian leadership. In such a culture dominance and ostentatious displays of power might be considered appropriate for leaders whereas in a more egalitarian culture leaders should emphasize egalitarian leadership. (Den Hartog et al., 1999,p. 228) This can furthermore be reflected in the leader attribute study reported in the GLOBE project. The GLOBE study has found that in all participating countries an outstanding leader is expected to be motivational, encouraging and dynamic but not dictatorial and ruthless. The importance of many other leader attributes was found to vary across cultures, which reflect high power distance versus egalitarianism in the different cultures. Attributes such as “domineering”, “elitists” and “status-conscious” were found to be appreciated for in leaders in high but not low power distance cultures (Den Hartog et al, 1999,p.241f)

In the list of 74 countries France, who has a rather high power distance index, receives place 27/29 while Sweden, who is among the countries with the lowest power distance ends up on place 67/68. (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005,p.561) The power distance dimension indicates that in Sweden the distance between superior and subordinate is rather small and that there is a mutual relationship between them. The subordinates expect to be consulted when it comes to taking decisions even though it is accepted that it is the leader who has the final saying. In France on the other hand, the power distance indicates that there is a big difference in distributed power between subordinates and leader, and the subordinates are strongly dependent on their leaders. Both the leader and the follower believe that the relationship is
unequal but it is accepted that the leader has certain privileges (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p.72).

b) Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance is the cultural dimension that describes to which extent a society feels threatened by uncertain and ambiguous situations. As a consequence, societies with a high uncertainty avoidance index provides career stability, establishes more formal rules, is less tolerant towards deviant ideas and behaviors, and believe in absolute truths and the attainment of expertise, to a larger extent than societies with low uncertainty avoidance index. (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p.183ff) A study by Offermann & Hellmann (1997, p.347) looked at actual leader behavior, and their findings indicated that leaders from high uncertainty avoidance countries tend to be more controlling, less delegating and less approachable compared to leaders from low uncertainty avoidance countries.

Sweden is on place 70/71 out of 74 countries and has a low uncertainty avoidance index. This indicates that individuals in Sweden are more likely to fear formal rules and are more comfortable with common sense and freedom at work. France on the other hand is on place 17/22 out of 74 and has a rather high uncertainty avoidance index. (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p.183f) This indicates that France is a country where rules and regulations are used to control the rights and obligations of employees and leaders. This creates a clear structure in organizations, which is often appreciated, as people need formal rules and like clear instructions (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p.197ff).

c) Individualism

Individualism is the cultural dimension that describes the individual’s and the group’s role respectively in the society. The majority of the world’s societies are collectivistic, which means that the interest of the group is more important in relation to the interest of the individual. (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p.88f) Individuals in a collectivistic culture tend to have a stronger attachment to their organization, and they also tend to be more willing to suppress their individual goals to group goals, than individuals in a individualistic culture (Triandis, 2001, p.36). Schwartz (1999, p.27) takes a slightly different approach to this culture dimension, rather describing it as the extent to which people in societies are embedded in the group versus autonomous. Individuals in autonomous cultures find meaning in their life through their uniqueness whereas individuals in the opposite cultures find meaning and direction in their life through participating in the group and identifying with its goals.

Sweden and France receive an equal ranking when it comes to the individualism index (13-14/74). The high ranking for both countries indicates that both France and Sweden are individualistic societies. (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p.91) Furthermore the equal ranking between Sweden and France in individualism indicates that it is a culture dimension that is less likely to explain differences in leadership behavior between these two countries.

d) Masculinity

Masculinity is the cultural dimension that describes to which extent the dominant values in a society are considered as masculine. A masculine society values assertiveness, the acquisition of money and things, challenges and the possibility to advance. In a masculine society men should be ambitious and tough while women should be gentle and focused on relationships. In
a feminine culture relationships are very important and both men and women should be modest and focused on relationships. (Hofstede & Hofstede,2005,p.132f) Neither France nor Sweden can be classified as very masculine societies. However, Sweden who is the most feminine country in the ranking is significantly less masculine than France, which is positioned as country 47/50 out of the 74 countries. These differences indicate that in a more feminine country like Sweden, conflicts are preferable solved through compromises whereas in France, which is somewhere in the middle between masculinity and femininity, the relationship is less important and verbal insults are rather common elements in discussions. (Hofstede &Hofstede,2005,p.132ff)

The culture dimension of masculinity may be the most critiqued of Hofstede’s dimensions. Critics argue that the masculinity dimension includes too many different topics that are furthermore not necessarily related. The potentially different topics of the masculinity dimension include gender role division, assertiveness, toughness in social relationships, being humane, and being performance oriented (Dickson, Den Hartog & Mitchelson,2003,p.745). In an attempt to address this critique the GLOBE study instead measured the different aspects of masculinity separately and labeled them gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, performance orientation and humane orientation (House et al,2002,p.6; Javidan et al,2006,p.69). The dimension of assertiveness will now be further introduced as France and Sweden are different in terms of assertiveness, which could be relevant in explaining differences in leadership behavior between Swedish and French leaders in this study.

e) Assertiveness

Assertiveness is the cultural dimension that describes to what extent individuals in a society are assertive, tough, confrontational and aggressive in their relationships with others (House et al,2002,p.6). Assertiveness can be seen as a style of responding, which involves making one’s wants known to others and therefore being direct and unambiguous when expressing oneself is often associated with this (Dickson et al, 2003,p.18). France is ranked rather high in terms of assertiveness, which indicates that relationships are more aggressive in France than in many other societies. This is likely to be a consequence from the French educational system in which debating and persuasive writing is systematically practiced. In France it is valued that individuals can say exactly what they mean or feel in a concise, direct manner. (Castel et al., 2007,p.566f) Sweden, on the other hand, has the lowest international ranking in this cultural dimension. This result indicates that Swedes are more timid, non-dominant and nonaggressive in social relationships. As a consequence foreigners often perceive Swedes as shy, reserved and cold-hearted. This does not necessarily mean that Swedes are feeling less emotion than other nationalities but their subtle expression of feelings can be very difficult for foreigner to interpret. The importance to keep control over one’s emotions is introduced early in during the upbringing in Sweden and Swedes are internationally known for their desire to avoid conflicts. This conflict avoidance can be connected to the strong strive for consensus that is favored in Sweden. A conflict is obviously a threat to consensus since it hinders a good dialogue so people are expected to be kind towards each other. In Sweden everyone’s opinions, ideas and experiences are respected and listened to since all individuals are considered potential contributors of the accomplishments of tasks or to fining the solution to a problem. (Holmberg &Åkerblom,2007,p.47ff) Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1997,p.9) describe this dimension in terms of neutral versus emotional cultures. In northwestern European countries, such as Sweden, business relationships are typically instrumental whereas further south, like in France, banging your fist on the table or leaving a conference room in anger during a negotiation is all part of business.
f) Long-term orientation

Long-term orientation is the cultural dimension in which societies promote virtues oriented toward future rewards, in particular endurance and thrifty. The opposite, short-term orientation promote virtues related to past and present, such as respect for tradition and to fulfill social obligations. Sweden and France are both ranked somewhere in the middle of the participating countries in the long-term index, 23 and 19 out of 39. (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p.226) Because of the equal ranking between Sweden and France in terms of long-term orientation, this culture dimension is considered less likely to be relevant in explaining differences in leadership behavior between Swedish and French leaders in this study.

2.5.2 Concluding reflections on culture dimensions

I believe that the presented culture dimensions can serve as an initial framework from which I can start to make sense of the behavior of Swedish leaders in France. For example, the difference in power distance between Sweden and France indicates that it is not appropriate that a Swedish leader, who is used to an equal Swedish culture, to behave in the same manner when relocating to a more hierarchical France. As I have already mentioned, I recognize that the culture dimension framework provide me with stereotypes and not a perfect reflection Swedish and French culture. Another limitation that I see with the culture dimension is the “either-or” poles within the dimensions. I think it would be more reasonably to assume that two opposite cultural traits are present in a country even though one trait might be statistically stronger. Hofstede himself has argued that not too much should be expected of the culture dimensions, since they consists of abstractions, and that they should not be extended beyond their limited area of usefulness (Osland & Bird, 2000, p.68).

I recognize that the contributions of the culture dimensions in this study should not be extended beyond their limited area of usefulness. I am aware of the limitations in gained understanding that the countries’ index placements in the cultural dimensions can bring. I have chosen to introduce Sweden and France’s respective placement within the culture dimension indexes; however this is not an indication that I consider the index ranking as a statistical truth. I have simply chosen to present the findings in a similar manner as in the original study. As a have already mentioned, I believe that the presented culture dimensions can serve as an initial framework from which I can start to make sense of the behavior of Swedish leaders in France, as long as I am aware of its limitations.

This is also the case of the following section of Swedish and French leadership. The studies in the next framework are some of the few studies that identify Swedish and French leadership, and which are likely to be beneficial to the understanding of a Swedish and French leadership style. However, the fact remains that they also represent a stereotype and therefore we must be aware of their limitations.

In order to gather additional information on leadership behavior of Swedish and French leaders, and how Swedish leaders might have to adjust their leadership, previous research on Swedish and French leaders respectively will now be presented in order to see if it is possible to distinguish a typical Swedish or French leadership style.

2.5.3 The Swedish leader

Holmberg & Åkerblom (2006, p.320) found support for the assumption that there is a Swedish
leadership style in their GLOBE founding analysis of 900 Swedish middle managers. Swedish leaders considered that it is very important as a leader to be team-oriented and participative. The leader should be able to build, integrate, coordinate and sustain a team in which the members collaborate in a collegial and egalitarian manner. The egalitarian values of the Swedish culture can clearly be detected in the Swedish management model. Top executives are very informal and they do not hesitate to communicate directly with more junior employees (Gesteland, 2005, p. 301). Swedish leaders are in general very available for their subordinates and they are often socializing with their subordinates (Mårtensson, 1998, p. 343f). The Swedish leader also seek consensus by making decisions through cooperation and as a result Swedish leadership can be considered as very vague and imprecise because of its extensive delegation of authority. It is not unlikely for a Swedish leader, when giving an order, to say something like, “see what you can do about it!”. This behavior of the Swedish leader is demonstrating trust in the subordinates and their own understanding of a problem as opposed to giving direct orders. (Edström & Jönsson, 1998, p. 167) The notions of equality, vagueness and consensus are important in order to understand leadership in a Swedish context. These notions are rooted in an ideology that evolved over a period of time in Sweden between the late 1930s and the 1990s. With its strong notion of the collective, this ideology emerged from attempts to combine economic growth with democracy and programs for social development. (Holmberg & Åkerblom, 2007, p. 33) The egalitarian values in the Swedish culture can also be traced to the strong promotion of collective interests though labor unions. Sweden is a country with a very high unionization rate as almost 9 out of 10 of the wage earners in Sweden are members of a union, compared to around 10 % in France (Holmberg & Åkerblom, 2007, p. 41).

2.5.4 The French leader

The traditional French leadership style contrasts sharply with the Swedish flat structure and egalitarian approach. French leaders tend to manage their subordinates in a very authoritarian style and they are often reluctant to delegate authority. Therefore the French leader is also expected to be highly competent and to know the answer to practically every question that comes up. Socialization with their subordinates is not very common among French leaders. (Gesteland, 2005, p. 252) Leaders have historically been romanticized, glorified and allowed considerable influence in France, which can not the least be seen through the numerous statues, streets and buildings that are named in recognition of great leaders in France. French intellectuals have always occupied a special position in French society and the dynamism in French leadership today originates from a strong intellectual tradition. Intellectual elite is very much the case of France also today since power and authority more or less automatically comes to the graduates of the most prestigious higher education systems. However, French companies are also gradually moving towards a more horizontal, participative structure. French subordinates generally adopt an ambivalent attitude towards authority and employers. Employees tend to rely on their leaders and respect authority; however, as French leaders often make decisions without consulting their subordinates, the latter may eventually challenge authority. The contrast between authority and freedom has throughout history played an important role in the French society. Since the Middle Ages, submission to hierarchy and lack of autonomy remains French features, which however, clashes with the values of freedom and fraternity, originally expressed as ideals during the French Revolution. (Castel et al, 2007, p. 548ff) This is still reflected in France today where French inhabitants are standing up for their rights through continuous strikes and demonstrations.

Given the significant differences between Sweden and France in their cultures as well as in
their leadership it seems like expatriated Swedish leaders are up for quite the challenge in France. Therefore it will now be interesting to look a bit closer at leaders expectations of the international assignment and why they chose to go abroad.

2.6 Expectations and motives of expatriation

The classic corporate motivations to send an expatriate on an international assignment, such as facilitating the development of new markets abroad or the management of foreign subsidiaries (Harzing, 2001,p.373), were identified in the introduction of this study. Although much less in known about expatriates’ own motivations (Stahl et al., 2002,p.217), there are studies that focus on why the expatriates themselves chose to accept international assignments. A few of them will be presented in the following section.

The individual’s consideration of the impact that the international assignment may have on the own development and the career opportunities is in the existing literature the key motive to why individuals accept international assignments. For instance, Miller & Cheng (1978,p.30) found that career advancement is the number one motivator for managers to accept to go abroad. Similarly, Stahl et al (2002,p.220) and Stahl & Cerdin (2004,p.892) found that expatriates primarily consider the international assignment as an opportunity for personal challenge and professional development. One reason to why expatriates consider international assignments important for career development is the opportunity to acquire skills and experiences usually not available at home (Tung,1998,p.130) such as intercultural leadership skills (Dickmann et al., 2008,p.740). Other findings indicate that individuals are also guided to accept international assignments by motives such as desire for adventure, travel, and life change (Richardson & Mallon, 2005,p.412f) as well by the financial impact of working abroad (Dickmann et al, 2008,p.738)

It should however also be mentioned that individuals could be reluctant to accept international assignments, as expatriation is not only perceived to have positive affects on careers. Although not specifically part of this study, studies have, for example, found problems with the repatriation of expatriates, which in turn is likely to affect individual’s willingness to accept international assignments. For example, Selmer (1999) found that loss of status, loss of autonomy, loss of career direction and feelings that the international assignment is not of much value to the home company, as well as family and financial problems are typical issues related to repatriation. In addition, many repatriated managers, as much as one in four, leave or intend to leave their home company within one year after returning home (Selmer,1999,p.79). The home companies failure in their support of repatriates may negatively affect companies abilities to find candidates to accept international assignments as the individual can see what might happen to them when they come home (Forster & Johnsen, 1996,p.184), which is not likely to boost the confidence in an expatriate career.

Either way, studies show that the expatriate’s expectations on the international assignment and the life in the new culture are important as they are directly affecting the cultural adjustment that the expatriate go through (Caliguri et al,2001,p.366). Accurate expectations diminishes insecurities and negative reactions, which in turn can contribute to an effective cultural adjustment (Black et al,1991,p.305).

In order to better understand the adjustment process that Swedish leaders are facing when expatriating to France, the following paragraphs will examine the existing expatriate literature in an attempt to understand cultural adjustment and how the expatriated leaders can prepare in
order to facilitate the adjustment to the host country. Finally possible difficulties that leader could face during the adjustment will be elucidated.

2.7 Cultural adjustment

As many expatriated leaders are sent on assignments to countries with substantially different cultures compared to their home countries, the expatriated leaders need to be prepared for the differences awaiting them. When expatriated leaders learn the rules for appropriate behavior in a foreign setting, they are likely to face situations that involve cultural differences that test their abilities to function successfully in the new setting and their comfort with the new cultural rules. The way the expatriate leaders react to those situations and navigate through the cultural differences will influence their own, as well as the organizations, effectiveness and performance (Black & Gregersen, 1999, p. 57).

In the management literature there are numerous examples of situations or interactions with culturally different norms, including giving feedback (Early et al., 1999, p. 615), seeking feedback (Sully de Luque & Sommer, 2000, p. 843), delivering constructive criticism (Takeuchi et al., 2001, p. 322f), negotiating (Brett & Okumura, 1998, p. 502; Tinsley, 2001, p. 589) and resolving a conflict (Morris et al., 1998, p. 741). The adaptation to situations with cultural variable norm also has well-established benefits. For instance, adaptation can increase the likelihood of positive management (Montagliani & Giaclone, 1998, p. 605) such as being well liked, fitting in and gaining the respect, trust and friendship of clients, colleagues and subordinates (Early & Ang, 2003, p. 165).

Although one of the most common things to learn before relocating to a new country is the language of the host habitants, the previous paragraph illustrates that there are other things an expatriated leader needs to know, such as significant differences in values, norms, appropriate behavior and communication. There are some things that the home company can do to help the expatriate leader getting prepared for whatever cultural differences there might be with the home and the host country. For example, the expatriate leader might be provided with appropriate cross-cultural training.

2.7.1 Cross-cultural training (CCT)

Cross-cultural training has generally been defined as any intervention designed to increase the skills and knowledge of expatriates to help them operate efficiently in the unfamiliar host culture (Brewster & Pickard, 1994, p. 18). Cross-cultural training is a rather new phenomenon; as little as three decades ago, cross-cultural training was not very widespread among multinational companies. For example, Tung (1981, p. 76) stated that only 32 percent of American companies provided their expatriates with some sort of international training. In other words, little attention was given to this very important aspect of expatriate management in earlier years. The fundamental reason for the lack of cultural training seem to be the assumption that good management is good worldwide (Osman-Gani, 2000, p. 213). Nowadays, expatriate training is becoming more and more customary in multinational organizations. One reason for this might be that cross-cultural training has been identified as a means to facilitating effective cross-cultural interactions and cultural adjustment, as suggested by Caligiuri et al., (2001, p. 358).

There are three main objectives with cultural training. Firstly, the cultural training should enable the expatriate to understand appropriate cultural behavior and suitable ways to
performing job tasks in the host country (Black & Mendelhall, 1990, p.124; Brewster & Pickard, 1994, p.18). Secondly, cultural training will help the expatriate deal with unforeseen events in the new culture and therefore also reduce conflicts due to unexpected situations and actions (Early, 1987, p.696). The final objective of cross-cultural training is that it creates realistic expectations for the expatriates when it comes to living and working in the new culture (Black et al., 1991, p.305).

Even though expatriate training is becoming more and more customary in many companies today, there are still certain doubts concerning the effectiveness of such training. While some studies have found a positive influence on cultural training on expatriate adjustment (Selmer, 2002, p.83; Waxin & Panaccio, 2005, p.57; Osman-Gani & Rockstuhl, 2009, p.283) other researchers have found no influence, or indeed a negative impact of cultural training and expatriate adjustment (Kealey & Protheroe, 1996, p.162; Puck et al., 2008, p.2192). Bird et al., (1999, p.164) state that the overall effectiveness of pre-departure training is hindered since people that are not yet living the experience lack a frame of reference to make the cross-cultural information relevant. Instead they argue that in-country training is a better vehicle than pre-departure training for providing culture specific information for the complex adjustment problems that expatriates are facing.

Much attention in the literature has been given to cultural learning as a step in adjusting to the host culture. In certain publications, authors make a distinction between two types of adjustments. Although the concepts of socio-cultural and psychological adjustment are interrelated, they are concerned with different aspects of the expatriate’s adjustment. The socio-cultural adjustment deals with interactive aspects of the new culture and the expatriate’s ability to “fit in”, whereas the psychological adjustment relates to the psychological, or emotional well-being of the expatriate (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999, p.424). The socio-cultural adjustment is concerned with the expatriate’s social learning and has been presented in the previous paragraphs. The psychological adjustment on the other hand is best understood within a stress and coping framework and will now be further examined.

Quite a few studies indicate that cross-cultural adjustment is easier said than done because of the internal conflicts that may arise, when the behavior in the host culture is inconsistent with the expatriates own values and beliefs. The act of purposefully modifying one’s behavior can be experienced as a stressful event and therefore it seems appropriate to further investigate how the adjustment can be a challenging process for the expatriate leader.

2.7.2 Difficulties in cultural adjustment

Along with the benefits that comes with expatriates cultural adaptations, there is also a set of parallel psychological challenges (Mak et al., 1999, p.80; Sanchez et al., 2000, p.105). For instance, foreign leaders and employees may lack cultural skills or at least feel that they lack cultural skills to produce the appropriate behavior in the host country, which can result in performance anxiety (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998, p.70f) or embarrassment for the expatriate (Keltner & Buswell, 1997, p.261) in front of a critical audience of host nationals (Edmondson, 1999, p.380). In addition, the required behavior in the host country might also conflict with the expatriate’s deeply integrated values and beliefs from the home country and which could lead to psychological distress (Sanchez et al., 2000, p.96; Leong & Ward, 2000, p.764). The existing literature explains that when interacting with the host subordinates, the leader is likely to encounter challenges to his or her own values, beliefs and behavioral norms (Van Vianen et al., 2004, p.705f). As a consequence the individuals might feel that they cannot adjust their
behavior, since for a lot of people it leads to questioning the own identity (Javidan et al, 2006,p.85).

Molinsky (2007) is another researcher who similarly argues for the important role that emotions play in determining an individual’s experience in adapting to a new culture. He presents the concept of “cross-cultural code-switching”, which is identified as “the act of purposely modifying one’s behavior, in a specific interaction in a foreign setting, to accommodate different cultural norms for appropriate behavior” (Molinsky,2007,p.624). In other words, cross-cultural code switching forces an individual to consciously deviate from accustomed behavior of the native culture to instead engage in behavior appropriate to the foreign culture. One challenge of cross-cultural code-switching is to behave according to the host country norms, while also behaving in a way that is not potentially in conflict with one’s personal values. The individual’s personal values are an “internal moral compass” (Hitlin & Piliavin,2004,p.362) and play an important role in influencing how the individual will experience a cross-cultural code-switch. An identity conflict occurs when the behavioral norms in the new culture make it difficult for an individual to act both in a culturally appropriate manner, and in a manner that honors his or her internalized system of values, shaped by the home cultural background. Whenever the appropriate behavior for the host culture conflicts with the individual’s deeply held personal values, it is likely to lead to high levels of negative emotions for the individual, and therefore a burdensome feeling towards the switch. (Molinsky,2007,p.624ff)

Research has however identified a few variables that are associated with a better psychological adjustment. For instance, the degree of discrepancy between the home culture norms and the host culture norms are suggested to impact the difficulty that the individual may experience during a cross-cultural switch (Molinsky,2007,p.627). In other words, it would be easier for an expatriated leader to adjust to a country that is culturally similar to the home country.

Differences in individuals also stand out as relevant to psychological adjustment. The concept of self-monitoring refers to the individual’s ability to consciously observe and regulate behaviors. Low self-monitors are individuals who are less attentive to situational cues and who behave more consistently with their actual feelings and beliefs. High self-monitors are individuals who tend to strategically cultivate their behavior across social contexts and who consequently may adjust more effectively in an intercultural work setting. (Gangestad & Snyder,2000,p.530f)

There is also evidence that socio-cultural adjustment might be easier in more developed or modern countries. For instance, Ward & Kennedey (1999,p.671) found that multinational aid workers in Nepal experienced far more problems with their socio cultural adaptation than did aid workers in Singapore. There are also suggestions that some national or cultural groups might be more adaptable than others to foreign cultures (Cochrane & Stopes-Roe; 1977,p.195; Ward & Kennedy,1999,p.617). This could be explained by the proposition that some societies are better equipped with intercultural awareness and cross-cultural familiarities than others (Ward & Kennedy,1999,p.671).

2.8 Theoretical summary

The main purpose of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of the subjective adjustment process of the expatriated leader, and to describe how the expatriate leader adjusts
the leadership behavior to the host culture from an outward, as well as inward perspective. In order to do that the experience of the adjustment process that Swedish leaders go through when they expatriate to France will be studied. To address the purpose, two research questions were designed. The reader will now be reminded of these research questions and what parts of the theoretical framework that will be brought along to the study. In addition I will highlight what we do not know and thus what I want to find out with this study.

Research questions:

What expectations did Swedish leaders have on the expatriation and adjustment process before departure?

This research question was designed in order to learn more about the expectations that the Swedish leaders had on the expatriation before departure. Although not explicitly stated this research question also contains the matter of how the expatriate leaders have prepared for the international assignment based on these expectations, which will be further elaborated in the end of this section. In an attempt to better understand the experiences of the Swedish leaders when it comes to expectations and preparation accordingly, the main findings from the literature on expatriate expectation and preparation will be rapidly repeated.

The expatriate literature highlight the importance of the expatriate’s expectations on the international assignment and the life in the new culture, since they are directly affecting the cultural adjustment that the expatriate go through (Caliguri et al,2001,p.366). Accurate expectations diminishes insecurities and negative reactions, which in turn can contribute to an effective cultural adjustment (Black et al,1991,p.305).

Previous research suggests that the main motivators for expatriates to accept foreign assignments are personal challenge and professional development (Stahl et al,2002,p.220; Stahl & Cerdin 2004,p.892). Other motivators include the opportunity to acquire intercultural leadership skills (Dickmann et al,2008,p.740), the desire for adventure and travel (Richardson & Mallon,2005,p.412f) as well as the financial reward for accepting the work abroad(Dickmann et al,2008,p.738)

Furthermore the expatriate literature suggest that there are things that the home company can do in order to help the expatriate leader to prepare for whatever cultural differences there might be with the home and the host country. For instance, the expatriate leader might be provided with appropriate cross-cultural training. Cross-cultural training of expatriates is today becoming more and more frequent in contemporary multinational companies, perhaps because it has previously been identified as a means to facilitating effective cross-cultural interactions and cultural adjustment (Caligiuri et al, 2001,p.358). For instance, it is argued that cross-cultural training is able to allow the expatriate to understand appropriate cultural behavior and suitable ways to performing job tasks in the host country (Black & Mendelhall, 1990,p.124; Brewster & Pickard,1994,p.18). Furthermore, cross-cultural training is argued to help the expatriate deal with unforeseen events in the new culture and therefore also reduce conflicts due to unexpected situations and actions (Early,1987,p.696 ). Finally, cross-cultural training is argued to create realistic expectations for the expatriates when it comes to living and working in the new culture (Black et al,1991,p.305). It should however be remembered that there are also certain doubts concerning the effectiveness of cross-cultural training. For instance, some researchers have found no influence, or indeed a negative impact of cultural training on expatriate adjustment (Kealey & Protheroe,1996,p.162; Puck et al,2008;2192).
As mentioned in the beginning of this section the first research question also contains the matter of how the expatriate leaders have prepared for the international assignment based on their expectations. As far as I am concerned it seemed reasonable to assume that expectations and preparations are closely interlinked since the expatriate leaders would prepare for the international assignment according to the expectations they have on the international assignment. Without any real support in previous literature, these are aspects of the expectations and preparations that I wish to know more about in order to understand the adjustment process of the expatriate leaders. These aspects will be elucidated by questions 6-11 in the interview guide, which is enclosed in the appendix of this study, and which aim to investigate the leaders expectations, preparations and whether they prepared according to their expectations, as well as what support they received from the home company in their preparations.

How do the Swedish leaders experience that their leadership should be adjusted to the French context, from an outward as well as inward perspective?

This research question was designed as an attempt to better understand the experiences of the Swedish leaders when it comes to how they have adjusted their leadership behavior to the French context as well as their attitude to the adjustment of leadership behavior. The main findings from the literature on leadership style, cultural differences between Sweden and France as well as behavioral adjustment will be rapidly repeated.

According the literature there is such a thing as a Swedish leadership style. A typical Swedish leader can be characterized as team-oriented, equal, informal and available (Holmström & Åkerblom 2006,p.320; Gesteland,2005,p.301; Mårtensson, 1998,p.343f). The French leader on the other hand is authoritarian and often reluctant to delegate authority. The French leader is described as somewhat of an expert who keeps a distance to the subordinates. (Gesteland,2005,p.252)

Previous research illustrates some cultural differences between Sweden and France that are likely to affect the leadership behavior. For instance, the culture dimension of power distance, where Sweden scores low and France high, indicates that there is much bigger difference in distributed power between leader and subordinates in France compared to in Sweden (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005,p.72). Previous research have found that subordinates from a high power distance culture are more reluctant to challenge their supervisors and more afraid to express disagreement with their supervisors (Adsit et al,1997,p.394). The high power distance in France also indicates that French subordinates are likely to expect an autocratic leadership style and to be dependent on their leaders. (Den Hartog et al,1999,p. 228). Uncertainty avoidance is another cultural dimension that is likely to affect leadership behavior of a Swedish leader in France. A study by Offermann & Hellmann (1997,p.347) looked at actual leader behavior and their findings indicated that leaders from high uncertainty avoidance countries tend to be more controlling, less delegating and less approachable compared to leaders from low uncertainty avoidance countries. In other words, leaders in a high uncertainty country like France, tend to be more controlling, less delegating and less approachable than leaders from a low uncertainty avoidance country, such as Sweden. Furthermore, assertiveness is a cultural dimension that describes to what extent individuals in a society are tough, confrontational and aggressive in their relationships with others (House et al,2002,p.6). France is ranked rather high in terms of assertiveness, which means that relationships are more aggressive in France than in Sweden, who has the lowest international
ranking in this cultural dimension. This results indicate that a non-dominant, nonaggressive and consensus seeking Swedish leader (Holmberg & Åkerblom, 2007, p.47), might have to be prepared for a much more direct, aggressive ways of communicating with others in France. These cultural differences between Sweden and France indicate that if a Swedish leader operates in France on the basis of how he or she operates in Sweden; the chances are that the leader would face some serious challenges or make some very bad decisions.

This part of the theoretical framework provide me with a first frame of reference in order to understand leadership behavior of the Swedish leaders in France, however, what I can obtain from this material is restricted due to its stereotypical and out-of-date limitations. From the collected material I cannot know what leadership style the Swedish leader had before departure, what leadership behavior is appropriate in the French culture and thus how the Swedish leaders have had to adjust their leadership behavior to better suit the French context? These aspects that concern the Swedish leaders adjustment in France, from an outward perspective, will be elucidated by question 12-16, which aim to provide me with an overall understanding on a Swedish leader’s adjustment process in France. The understanding of how the Swedish leaders should adjust their behavior to the French context, to what extent they might have to adjust, is important in order to understand how the adjustment could be experienced as difficult.

The expatriate literature highlights possible difficulties for a leader to adjust the own leadership behavior. Even if an expatriate leader can learn about appropriate behavior for the host culture, there is a risk that the required behavior in the host country might conflict with the expatriate’s deeply integrated values and beliefs from the home country, and which could lead to psychological distress (Sanchez et al, 2000, p.96; Leong & Ward, 2000, p.764). The existing literature explain that when interacting with the host subordinates, the leader is likely to encounter challenges to his or her own values, beliefs and behavioral norms (Van Vianen et al, 2004, p.705f). As a consequence the individuals might feel that they cannot adjust their behavior, since for a lot of people it leads to questioning the own identity (Javidan et al, 2006, p.85).

Given that behavioral adjustment has been identified as a difficult experience, from an inward perspective, it felt necessary to find out more about behavioral adjustment, if it is something that is desirable, or even possible?

Turning to the existing theory for support on whether behavioral adjustment is possible, there is on one hand the contingency approach to leadership, which enables and encourages behavioral adjustment. The essence of a contingency approach to leadership is that the most effective leaders are the leaders who make their behavior contingent for different situations (DuBrin, 2010, p.133). Meanwhile, it is also argued that the leadership style is a permanent aspect of the leader’s behavior and that it is difficult, and therefore not really desirable to modify the leadership behavior according to situations (Vroom & Jago, 2007, p.20). Another view on adjusting leadership behavior is the concept of authentic leadership, which highlights the importance of being your own person and staying true to your own values. To be authentic the leader must develop his or her own leadership style, which should be consistent with the individual’s personality and character (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p.320). However in order to be effective in today’s fast changing and highly competitive environment, it is also important that leaders are able to adapt their leadership style to fit occurring situations. In other words, authentic leadership encourages the behavioral adjustment of good leaders, however, with a restriction of the extent of the adjustment.
This part of the theoretical framework contributes to an initial understanding of possible underlying issues of the journey inward that the Swedish leader goes through when adjusting the own leadership behavior to the French context. However, this material is not adequate as a sole foundation to understand the psychological aspects of the Swedish leader’s adjustment process. As already mentioned, the understanding of how the Swedish leaders adjust their behavior to the French context, to what extent they might have to adjust, is important in order to understand how the adjustment could be experienced as difficult. Therefore some aspects of the Swedish leaders inward adjustment in France will, just as with the outward adjustment, be elucidated by questions 14-15, which aim at discover the Swedish leaders’ attitudes to behavioral adjustment. Questions 17-18 will thereafter more explicitly elucidate how the Swedish leaders experienced the behavioral adjustment and what personal difficulties they experienced while adjusting their leadership behavior to the French context. I also wish to find out whether there could be any advantages to be a Swedish leader in France. The aim of these questions is to obtain a deeper understanding of the inward journey that the Swedish leader goes through while outwardly adjusting the own leadership behavior to better suit the French context.
3. Research design and method

In this chapter I will present and motivate the choices I have made as a researcher for this study. These choices are presented as an attempt to be transparent about my assumptions that have influenced this study.

3.1 Narrative research

As I was trying to figure out how I best would learn more about how expatriate leaders adjust their leadership behavior to the host culture, I realized that narrative research would be the most suitable option and therefore a central choice for my study. Narratives or stories can be defined as “discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people’s experiences of it” (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997, p.xvi). This definition provides the key features of narratives in that they are first chronological (they are represented as a sequence of events), second, they are meaningful and third, they are inherently social in that they are produced for a specific audience (Elliott, 2005, p.4). Furthermore, this definition illustrates that although some researchers make a distinction between narratives and stories, they can also be used interchangeably, as they have been in this study.

In order to fulfill the purpose with this study I wished to study the experience of the adjustment that Swedish leader go through when they expatriate to France. A narrative research method allowed me to follow these individuals, these leaders and through their stories get a fuller picture of their experience of the adjustment that they went through. It was important for me to not split up their experiences into different incidents but rather to participate in the whole story that was their experience. A narrative method is described to be appropriate for the study of the particular individual, in a particular social place, and the particular stories of an individual that are assembled into a fuller picture of the individual (Riessman, 2008, p.11) In telling stories, the narrator creates a “plot”, a way to bring single events or a sequence of actions, experienced by the narrator, into a “meaningful whole” (Czarniawska, 2004, p.2). Narratives invite us as listeners to enter the perspective of the narrator (Riessman, 2008, p.9), which I believe allowed me to better understand the experience of the Swedish leaders through their reality. Narrative research is a method in which experiences are reflexively constructed into more or less accurate stories as it engages with the complex nuances of the perceived world and not the presumed real world (Rhodes & Brown, 2005, p.180). Although a narrative or a story provides an account that might be, at least in the first instance, consistent only in the narrator’s view, it is exactly that constructive act of creating a plot, that infuses the story with expressions of the narrator’s feelings, values, norms and beliefs (Soin & Scheytt, 2006, p.65). Such research provides one of the “clearest channels for learning about the inner world” of the narrators, their lives and their experienced reality (Lieblich , Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998, p.7) and therefore a story can provide different data than can be gathered on the basis of many other research methods.

Narrative research has recently been found particularly appropriate within the field of cross-cultural research (Soin & Scheytt, 2006; Gertsen & Söderberg, 2010). For instance, Gertsen & Söderberg (2010, p.249) argues that a narrative approach to expatriation and cultural encounters may deepen our understanding of the ways in which these phenomena are constructed as part of the social reality of those who experience them. Soin & Scheytt (2006, p.65ff) also distinguish a couple of reasons to use stories to enlighten cross-cultural
research. The first reason is that stories are told by local actors, who can be identified as experts for the interpretations of their own culture in another cultural setting. In other words, stories provide insight into the meanings that actors attribute to events in relation to their cultural background. Another reason to the use of stories is their ability to reveal hidden aspects of culture, such as the other side of rules, norms and values that might be of particular interest for cross-cultural research. Van Maanen (1988, p. 102) argued that the value of storytelling is its out of the ordinary or unique character since stories are not about what usually happens, but what rarely happens. In other word, not only are the usual, normal patterns of behavior embraced in stories but also how unusual, rare or even deviant behavior is formed, as well as what the reasons are for this behavior in different social setting, such as organizations (Soin & Scheytt, 2006, p. 66). Similarly, Bruner (2002, p. 15) states that as narratives usually arise from the deviation between something that the narrator expected to happen and something unexpected that happened instead, “culture is, figuratively, the maker and enforcer of what is expected” and therefore cultural encounters are likely to inspire storytelling.

3.1.1 Limitations of narrative research

The fact that narratives do not represent raw facts about events, but instead provide a more profound meaning in writing, is both the strength and the weakness of this method (Gabriel, 2000, p. 135). The data gathered in this research is events that are told after they already occurred. In other words, I am myself not present when the event occurred nor do I “[…] have direct access to another’s experience” (Riessman, 1993, p. 8) Instead, I am provided with the respondents’ description of the event and this is an important aspect of narrative research. The researcher must be aware of not interpreting the respondent’s narrative as objective facts or exact rendering of events since we will never know for sure to what extent the stories have been rationalized, consciously or unconsciously (Gertsen & Söderberg, 2010, p. 249). It is clear that the narrator play an important role for the findings of a narrative research. While people tell a story they can chose to emphasize certain things while playing down others. There are a large amount of factors that can have an impact on the story that is told. In all honesty, who hasn’t added on to a story they’re telling in order to make it a bit more interesting? In addition, the state of mind of the narrator is also likely to influence the story told. The story I tell the day I have been given some good news could be very different from the story I tell when I am in a bad mood. It is confusing and difficult to think about a story in terms of “the right story” when the same event could be perceived as exciting or horrifying in the same time. Therefore, it is important as a researcher to remember that the narrative can be considered a snapshot of the particular moment when I inquired the respondent.

As a researcher I also play an important role in the presented narratives in this study. As a researcher I can also be considered a narrator or a storyteller in this study. As Mishler (1995, p. 117) states; “it is clear that we do not find stories; we make stories”. I have been listening to the stories of the Swedish leaders, which I have later made into narratives. In other words, as a researcher I am not collecting data but rather co-constructing data with the participating Swedish leaders. I will discuss my own role in this study more in detail a bit later in this chapter.

3.2 Why a qualitative research method, such as narrative research?
It is commonly argued for in the literature that there is no intrinsically superior research method, that different methods can instead be more or less appropriate to the research and that it all depends on what the researcher is trying to find out (Silverman, 2005, p.6; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008, p.8). Narrative research is the qualitative research method that I have chosen, given the purpose of this study, to contribute to a better understanding of the subjective adjustment process of the expatriated leader, and to describe how the expatriate leader adjusts the leadership behavior to the host culture from an outward, as well as inward perspective. The choice of a qualitative research approach felt evident. There are many definitions of qualitative research; Denzin & Lincoln (2005, p.3) suggest the following:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices transform the world. [...] Qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic, approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them.

This definition strongly emphasizes the researcher’s presence and interpretative work in qualitative research. It is exactly the interpretative and understanding ambition of qualitative research that made it so suitable for what I wished to achieve with this study. It is also argued that qualitative research is especially appropriate for studies of leadership and leadership style. According to Bryman (2004, p.752), qualitative research of leadership tends to give greater attention to how leaders and leadership styles have to be, or tend to be, responsive to particular circumstances since the qualitative researcher tends to be more sensitive to the implications of particular circumstances.

3.3 Underlying assumptions in the qualitative research with a narrative approach

According to Klenke (2008, p.14) it is not possible to conduct rigorous research without understanding its philosophical underpinnings. This might be particularly important for qualitative research, such as narrative research, since it has been criticized for its difficulties in establishing the validity and reliability of the approaches and the information as well as difficulties in preventing or detecting researcher introduced bias. As a consequence, the researcher’s philosophical assumptions about ontology, epistemology and methodology are critical in framing the research process and require transparency in qualitative research (Klenke 2008, p.14). Therefore, I will present the assumptions that I have made about the nature of reality, or ontology, how knowledge is constructed, or epistemology, and the values that I bring to the selection of method, participants, data collection, analysis and interpretation in an attempt to be transparent of how they may influence the research process.

As a narrative and thus a qualitative researcher in this study, I emphasize an ontology that endorses multiple realities, socially constructed by individuals from within their own contextual interpretation. This can be further explained by the phenomenon of culture, which is central in this study. Culture can be described as a collective socially constructed phenomenon whose core is composed of explicit and tacit assumptions or understandings commonly held by a group of people. These assumptions and understandings serve as guides
to acceptable or unacceptable thoughts, feelings and behaviors; they are learned and passed on to new members of the group through social interaction. (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004, p.378). Similarly, given my ontological position of social constructivism, I assume that humans create their own social reality (Klenke, 2008, p.15f), which I will interpret in this study. As a qualitative researcher with a narrative approach, I also emphasize an epistemology that advocates the subjective meaning of social action and therefore stresses that social science should be studied through interpretation (Klenke, 2008, p.16). When the purpose of a study is to contribute to a better understanding of the complex adjustment process of the expatriate leader and how the expatriate leader should adjust the leadership behavior to better suit the host culture, it is the subjective realities of the Swedish leaders that would allow me to understand their experiences of the adjustment. I believe that the personal interpretations and experiences constitute the knowledge through which I will understand the adjustment process. In other words, I seek to understand the social world of the participating leaders through their interpretations of that world, which I believe would provide me with appropriate knowledge on the complex adjustment process of the expatriate leader and how the expatriate leader should adjust the leadership behavior to better suit the host culture.

3.4 Preconceptions

Hardly anyone would start a qualitative research without any preconceptions about the field or the nature of the phenomenon of interest of the researcher (Alasuutari, 1996, p.375). I have studied the principles of leadership at business schools both in Sweden and in France, and for the curious reader I can reveal that I did not experience any major differences in the studied leadership theories in Sweden or in France. Although I have never worked as a leader in France, or in Sweden for that matter, I do have extensive experience of relocating from Sweden to France. I also have experience from working for a French leader in France, which I can compare to working for a Swedish leader in Sweden. Even though I, as a Swede, have experienced difficulties with the French culture over all, I make no secret of the fact that I have a rather positive attitude towards France as a country. Given my epistemological assumptions, it would be impossible for me to guarantee to stay objective throughout the research process, and it is neither something that I find desirable in this study. I have however done my best to stay transparent by describing every step of the research process of this study, in order to offer the reader the possibility to create his or her own opinion on how my preconceptions may have affected this study.

At the same time, researchers argue that a researcher’s preconceptions are necessary in order to understand and explore as much as possible during the research (Conger, 1998, p.108), and thus that preconceptions are assets as well (Gummeson, 2006, p.178). I believe that my studies and more specifically, my previous experiences have been beneficial in exploring as much as possible about the Swedish leaders experience. I will soon describe this more in detail, as I will now move on to the research process.

3.5 The research process

3.5.1 Finding the right sources

For this study I did an initial literature review in order to gather enough of the existing literature of the topic of adjustment to develop a specific research problem and therefore also the significant purpose. With a defined purpose I thereafter conducted another literature review on scientific articles concerning cultural differences, cultural adjustment and
expatriation. The literature search was primarily conducted through databases available at Umeå University library, more specifically through Emerald and Business Source Premier. In order to find reliable scientific articles I have used the search tools peer reviewed and times cited in this database which indicate that the articles have been reviewed and extensively cited by other researchers, which I believe are important criteria in distinguishing serious and less serious research. Another method that also allowed me to find interesting and relevant articles was to search for interesting references from the articles that I had already found. Since it is reasonable to assume that serious authors use serious references I believe that these articles have not only been relevant but also reliable. Not the least since most of my articles have been published in well-known management journals or journals for qualitative studies.

In addition I have used a few books as support in this study. Since books often lack the process of peer reviewing, the credibility of a book is more likely to be concerned with the credibility of its author. I have tried to use well-established authors within their respective fields, such as (Yukl,2010), for my leadership theories and Silverman (2006;2008) for my methodological chapter. Despite the reputation of the authors, I have also tried to use a variety of authors with the intention to avoid individual researchers reasoning.

In the construction of the interview guide and as guidance of the overall research process I have used specific books or articles for qualitative research (i.e. Kvale & Brinkman,2009), qualitative research in leadership studies (i.e.Klenke,2008), narrative research in social science (i.e. Riessman,2008) or narrative studies in cross-cultural research (i.e Gertsen & Söderberg,2010). I believe that these specified resources have helped ensure the suitability of the research process of this particular study.

One challenge with the scientific articles that I have used in this study is their year of publication. A significant part of the most well established findings within cross-cultural adjustment date from the end of the 90’s. Since culture is an ever-changing phenomenon it is definitely an issue that much of the empirical studies date from more than a decade ago. In the same time, cross-cultural issues received a lot of attention during the 90’s so perhaps it is only natural that this is reflected in the existing research. Since much of the findings from the 90’s are still cited as the most relevant findings, also in more recent research, I have chosen to include them in this research, however with the complement of more up to date articles.

It should also be mentioned that I in this study have used a non-fiction book as a reference. Even though I am aware that George (2003) is not a scientifically correct reference, I have found his insights important for what I have tried to understand on the concept of authentic leadership.

3.5.2 Finding the participants

One of the main challenges with this study was to locate participating individuals for interviews. In order to gain understanding on how Swedish leaders have adjusted their leadership to a French context, I was looking for Swedish leaders who had experience from a leadership position in France. My goal with this study was to intentionally select participants who could contribute with an in-dept, information-rich understanding of the phenomenon of leadership behavioral adjustment in another cultural context. Therefore instead of using random sampling I used purposive or theoretical sampling, which allow the researcher to internationally select the respondents best suited for the purpose of the study.
I started my search for participants by contacting the Swedish chamber of commerce in Paris. Through the Swedish chamber of commerce I got access to their phonebook covering many Swedish companies as well as many individuals residing in France. I contacted all of the Swedish companies, describing the purpose of my study and what I was looking for in a respondent. I furthermore contacted a few Swedish associations in France as well as a few representatives for Swedes residing in France. Regarding selection criteria, my initial thought was to select respondents from one single industry in order to avoid differences in experiences that could be based on the pure industry differences. Given how difficult is was for me to find suitable respondents I decided to instead try to find respondents who had relocated from one industry in Sweden to the same or similar industry in France. Initially I was also looking for Swedish leaders who were currently working in France, but as these respondents seemed impossible to find, I decided to also include previous expatriates, however, who had not been home in Sweden for more than a few years so that the adjustment process would be somewhat fresh in mind. After my first interview I received a tip-of on another Swedish leader who could be suitable for my study. I have asked all participating leader whether they know any other leader that could be a suitable respondent and as a consequence I have used a mixture of purposive and snowball sampling.

My sample consists of four men and three women from in their thirties to in their sixties. I have tried to get an equal sample in terms of gender to find a representative group of people. It was not evident to find Swedish, female leaders in France and therefore I am thankful that I got in contact with Businet, a network of professional Swedish women in France, which helped me get in contact with additional respondents.

In my final sample I have two respondents who have lived in France for over ten years now and who, in addition, self-initiated their expatriation. Although I am aware that this affects the conclusions that I can draw from the results of this study, I have chosen to include these two respondents as they have so much experience, which have significantly contributed to the understanding of the adjustment process. Even though there is a difference between transferred expatriates or self-initiated expatriates, also in the literature (Suutari & Brewster, 2000,p.417; Peltocorpi & Jintae Frosoe, 2009,p.1096), I reason that these leaders have experienced similar needs for adjustment as the leaders sent by their home company. Even though the self-initiated leaders are likely to have experienced the adjustment process under somewhat different circumstances, they similarly have experienced the adjustment of their leadership behavior in another cultural context. Since it was a long time since the self-initiated leaders initially relocated to France, there is a risk that they have forgotten details about their initial adjustment. But since both these Swedish leaders have worked for companies where they have more recently continued to meet the Swedish versus French culture they have in very rich details shared their experiences of the adjustment over the years.

3.5.3 Creating the interview guide

The first questions of the interview guide of this study encourage the individual to tell more about him or her, the leadership history in Sweden, the international assignment, the respondent’s expectations on the international assignments and the corresponding
preparations. These initial questions were strategically chosen to let the respondent start off by talking about familiar subjects that were not sensitive. In addition, this research is about the adjustment process of the expatriate leaders and I felt that it was logical to ask questions in a chronological order. The initial questions often led the respondent to start to describe the adjustment process without interruptions, covering several of the subjects in the questions to come. I see this as a great advantage since it allowed the respondent to talk freely about what felt most significant with the adjustment process.

The perhaps more sensitive questions were intentionally saved towards the end of the interview, in order to allow the respondents to find their feet. The question on how the Swedish leaders experience that they have had to adjust their leadership style to the French context, in combination with examples of such situations, covers the main part of the expatriate’s outward and inward adjustment in this study. It has been my wish to let the respondents freely reflect upon their experience of the adjustment process and I strategically avoided specific questions in my interview guide in order to avoid leading the respondents in any direction. In almost all cases, the respondents have provided me with enough material from these two questions to be able to interpret their attitudes towards their adjustment process, both outwardly and inwardly. For the exceptions when they have not spoken about certain aspects of the adjustment all by themselves, I have asked questions to steer them towards the subject that I wanted to know more about. I did include a question of what personal difficulties the expatriate leader did encounter when adjusting the leadership behavior to the French context. Nevertheless, this question was sometimes also covered by the respondent’s reflection over how he or she has had to adjust the leadership behavior to better suit the French context. All the respondents had the interview guide sent to them in advance so they were more or less prepared for what I wanted to know.

3.5.4 Conducting the interviews

In this study I have all in all conducted 7 interviews, but I was prepared to adjust the number of participants if I, during the collection of the empirical data, either discovered that I had obtained a saturated material, or if I instead discovered that I did not have enough material. The question on how many interviews to conduct in a qualitative study is always difficult to answer. On one hand there is the issue with theoretical saturation, which suggest that a researcher should add new cases until they bring no new insights Merriam (1988,p.48). It is clear to me that every interview that I have conducted has brought new insights. Given the subjectivity of this research I believe that it would have been problematic to ever reach theoretical saturation, since each new respondent would have likely contributed with new perspectives. I assume that I would have been able to include more interviews in order to add further insights, but in the same time I feel that my 7 interviews have been satisfactory to find the large patterns in my material. This reasoning is supported by Kvale & Brinkman (2009,p.43) who suggest to “interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know”.

At the same time, researchers face a problem of trying to fit too much material into too little space (Phillips & Hardy,2002,p.79). Nylén (2005,p.16) points out that empirical presentation not only concerns trying to fit much data into little space but rather to make a strategic decision about its outline. I reason that this is a qualitative and not a quantitative study, which is why the focus should lay in the feasibility to deeply interpret and make reflections from the collected material and not in the number of interviews conducted. I perceive that it was
already a challenge to make the data from the conducted 7 interviews justice so I think that more material than I have already collected would have risked to been left out or be presented in a more quantitative manner. That could have led my study to lose its interpretative and understanding purpose, as well as its credibility.

My empirical material is solely collected through interviews. The deep-interview has really been the only option for me to obtain satisfying answers to my research questions. It definitely would have been optimal if I had been given the opportunity to participate in my respondents’ interactions with host country nationals in France, but in lack of this I will settle for the Swedish leader’s narrated memory of these interactions. With this comes of course a risk that the experience is told incomplete or biased, as I have previously discussed. In this study I have chosen to conduct semi-structured interviews, which means that I had designed an interview guide with the major themes for discussion outlined, while I allowed the respondents to freely reflect on the themes to reach new insights and angles on the topic of investigation. This research process has been rather flexible, both in terms of the interviews and in terms of theoretical dependency. The interviews have often been more of a discussion where the respondents have freely spoken about their adjustment process without being too controlled by the research questions. As a consequence, additional insights have come up, which have led to additional reading that in turn has made me consider the insights in new manners. Therefore the theoretical framework initially created for the collection of the empirical data has been influenced by the data collected and thus been modified along the way.

All interviews were conducted over the phone or skype, since face-to-face interviews were not an option in this research due to time and financial constraints. Although Sturges & Hanrahan (2004,p.116) have found that telephone interviews could provide information quite comparable to in-person interviews, I recognize that the phone interviews could have been a liability in a narrative research. It is possible that in-person interviews would have allowed me to create a closer connection to the respondents, which in turn could have encouraged the narration of experiences. Nevertheless, I feel that the respondents have been very openhearted and they have shared their experiences from the international assignment. On the other hand I will not know if they might have been even more open-minded to share their experiences if I would have conducted the interviews in person.

The conducted interviews were rather extensive, ranging from forty minutes to well over one hour. Before the actual questioning I asked the respondent for permission to record the interview, which none of the respondents had a problem with. I ensured all respondents that the interview would be completely anonymous as suggested by Kvale & Brinkman (2009,p.72) who emphasize the question of confidentiality by assuring that no personal data identifying the person would be disclosed. I recognize that it is a key ethical principle that the anonymity of the respondents should be respected, however once the combination of experiences and attributes are described in an empirical presentation it can be very difficult to ensure that a case does not become recognizable (Elliott,2005,p.142). I have done my best to preserve the anonymity of the respondents by giving the Swedish leaders fictive names and by not revealing the name of their home or host organizations.

The atmosphere during the interviews has been relaxed. In my recorded interviews I can hear the respondents underlying emotions as they tell me about their experiences, both joyful and more difficult. I did not experience any social obstacles throughout the conducted interviews and I think that the respondents have all been very open about their adjustment process. In
addition, the interviews were often rounded off by a discussion about our respective experiences from living in France, even if these discussions were more general and not leadership related. I think that this exchange of experiences reflect the open and relaxed atmosphere in which I conducted the interviews.

In this study I have chose not to make a discourse analysis of my narratives. Discourse analysis is common element within narrative research and it signifies that the researcher analyses the narrative or the text with a focus on how the language is utilized in different contexts (Czarniawska, 2004,p.viii). The reason to why I have chosen not to use a discourse analysis in this study is that my interviews describe the Swedish leaders’ experiences of the adjustment process, and that the focus of this study is on those experiences and less on how they are told. All narrative inquiry is of course concerned with content of the narrative; however, there are different approaches of narrative research, such as a thematic analysis of narratives, in which the content is the exclusive focus (Riessman,2008,p.53). I will describe this more in detail in the following section on the analysis.

3.6 Analyzing the collected material

From the problem and purpose of this study I formulated 2 research questions, which answers would help me fulfill the purpose. From these two research questions I have built up a suitable theoretical framework, which assertively has been modified along the way of this research. With the help of the theoretical framework I have detected a few important themes when it comes to the adjustment process, and from these themes an interview guide was created. The Swedish leaders’ experiences of the adjustment process have in this study been analyzed in three steps.

1) In the first step of the analysis the narratives have been summarized and interpreted in order to find the main plot, message or attitude towards the adjustment process that represent the experience of the leader, based on the research questions. The first step of the analysis has taken a more deductive approach in the sense that previous research has played an important role in creating a theoretical framework, in creating an interview guide and also in the analysis of the gathered empirical material. Although the conventional image of qualitative field research keeps pre structured designs to a minimum (Miles & Huberman,1999,p.17), I argue that it has not been possible, with the time constraints of this study, for me to wait for regularities to emerge from an unstructured collection of data. Not only is it very difficult to come to field research without any orienting ideas, but I also consider it a strength to be able to lead the research with a frame of reference, without for that matter seek to test theories.

2) In the second step of the analysis I have used a thematic approach to look at the common or distinctive elements in narratives of the leaders’ experience. This second step is not dependent on the first step, but instead I have compared, based on my research questions, the findings to the existing theory in an attempt to find an explanation to the events and experiences. Although more associated with grounded theory, a thematic approach is a possible means of simplifying theorization also in the analysis of narratives (Riessman,2008,p.74). I have chosen to include a thematic analysis as a means to highlight what is essential in my material. Another reason to why I chose to include a thematic approach is my wish to facilitate the understanding of the reader by avoiding repetitions. The second part of the analysis has initially taken a more deductive approach as the narratives are analyzed on the basis of the theoretically grounded themes from my interview guide. However, during the thematic analysis I found new insights that led me to create sub-themes emerged from the collected
material. Therefore, the second step of the analysis has also taken an inductive approach, which seeks to discover theoretically relevant issues from the collected data rather than from the existing theories (Klenke, 2008, p. 187). Miles & Huberman (1999, p. 17) explain that to alternate between theory and collected data in a combination of a deductive and inductive approach, is not only possible and allowed within research, but also necessary in many studies. In a narrative study such as my own, the theorizing across a number of cases while still preserving the narrative features, requires subtle shifts in methods (Riessman, 2008, p. 74).

3) In the third and final part I leave the themes and instead explore less prominent patterns across the different experiences of the adjustment process of the expatriate leaders. I reason that step 3, in combination with step 2, (and step 1 as well for that matter) would provide an additional perspective to existing patterns across the respondents and the events that they have told. One of the strengths with narrative research is that narratives also draw attention to what rarely happens and thus stress deviations from the entirety. This additional perspective would allow for a broader overall picture of the Swedish leaders adjustment process. This third step is even more inductive than step 2 since the patterns in this last section have completely emerged from the empirical findings. In other words the results of this study have evolved from the synthesis of existing theory and collected data, where the theory has served as an initial foundation for the research, while the empirical data from the investigation have complemented or challenged the existing theory.

3.7 Assessing the trustworthiness

According to Reissman (2008, p. 184) two levels of validity are relevant in narrative research; the story told by a research participant and the validity of the analysis or in other words, the story told by the researcher. I have previously discussed the issues with narrative research and thus whether it is a true story that the research participant provides. In the same time, to verify the truth or the facts in the participants stories is less relevant than investigating the story that I as a researcher provide, since it is the meaning that the participants themselves make of their experiences that are of interest in this research.

It is not evident to estimate the trustworthiness in the story that I as a researcher have told in this qualitative research. In an attempt to augment the trustworthiness of this study I have tried to be as transparent as possible about every step of the research process. The presentation of the empirical data is directly affecting the trustworthiness of a research since the empirical presentation constitute the reader’s only link between the studied field and the interpretation of the researcher (Nylén, 2005, p. 13). As I have previously mentioned I have not collected the data in this study but instead co-constructed data, in that I have been listening to the stories of the Swedish leaders, which I have later made into narratives. I have tried to stay true to the respondent’s own story by including his or her own expressions as well as numerous quotations. Furthermore, Reissman (2008, p. 197) argues that the credibility of a researcher’s representation is strengthened if it is recognizable to its participants. All my constructed narratives were sent back to the participating leaders for verification. Almost all leaders responded back to me to verify that the narrative represented what they have told me during the interview. In addition, a couple of the participating leaders chose to clarify some minor details.

When it comes to the interpretations that I have made in this study, I have tried to be clear in distinguishing between the participants’ stories and experiences, the existing theory and my own opinions. It has been my goal to enable the reader to “follow the presented evidence and
argument enough to make their own judgment as to the relative validity of the claim” of the sense that people make about events, themselves and others (Polkinghorne, 2007, p.476).
4. Narratives

To allow the reader to follow each of the interviewed leaders throughout this study, all of the participating leaders and the narratives of their experiences are presented in this chapter under the fictional names that I have assigned to them.

4.1 Alan

The following narrative is told by Alan, a management consultant in his early 60s who is living in Paris. Alan has been living in France for almost 30 years and most of his time he has been working as a CEO in various Swedish subsidiaries in France. Lately Alan has been working a lot with business development and cultural differences between France and Sweden. Alan describes himself as rather naïve when it comes to the expectations he had on cultural differences in leadership between Sweden and France at the time when he was offered his first manager position in France. Although Alan had already done an internship in Paris, and therefore was familiar with the French culture and the French language, he was not prepared for the issues of hierarchy, decision making, conflicts that a Swedish leader in France has to face. Alan, who self initiated his expatriation to France, did not receive any help from the company in France to prepare for the new environment. Still to this day Alan is surprised over how little time he actually spent on preparing for being a leader in France and how little time people, who are going abroad, in general spend on learning about culture and adjustment. Alan describes that a client of his, the CEO of a large Swedish company who had recently acquired a large French company, called him one day to tell him: “it took me 9 months to understand that I don’t understand anything at all”. Alan believes that this is one of the problems for a Swedish leader in France. “You don’t detect the differences on the outside, so you can’t understand it. It is incredibly easy to get frustrated or angry”. According to Alan, the more we understand of the other culture, the more we understand that we are just as weird in their eyes. “I often say that there is always logic in other people’s behavior, we just have to understand that other people don’t behave irrational as we may think but simply according to a different rationality than us”.

In Alan’s opinion the leadership behavior is one of the most difficult factors to understand in the other culture. French leaders don’t understand how Swedish leaders make a decision and why Swedish leaders always look for consensus and cooperation. To a Swedish leader the hierarchical French leadership style and the French leader’s superior attitude are similarly considered as rather odd. Alan describes that it can be difficult for a Swedish leader to understand the French leaders’ difficulties to work close to their subordinates, something that is considered normal and right in Sweden. However, Alan further explains that it is very important as a leader in France to keep a distance to the subordinates and through clothes, body language and language demonstrate leadership. “One cannot create a general “buddy”-leadership style here or subordinates will take advantage of that”. Alan has had own experiences of being too close to his French subordinates as a leader. To his experience it is not recommended to as a leader to show appreciation and give extra benefits to your employees as the French subordinates will want even more, if they ever receive more than they initially asked for. “In the end you will stand there with your back against the wall and realize that you have to become a more aggressive, negative leader who negotiates about everything”.

44
Alan believes that his own leadership style, at least from the beginning, is very Swedish. He describes his leadership style as very low key and he treats everybody equally. As a leader Alan is all about working with goals and how to reach them and he is also striving to decentralize the decision-making to the greatest possible extent.

Alan has experienced situations that have required him to adjust his leadership style. Although Alan is more typical Swedish in his leadership style in that he encourages participation and seeks decentralization, he has had to adapt to a more French leadership style with more confrontations and more individual decision-making. “I learned pretty fast that if you as a leader don’t make any clear decision, then no decision will be made at all”. It becomes very confusing for the French workers who tend to get disoriented without a leader who directs them with a firm hand. Even though Alan has adjusted his behavior and somewhat acted like a French leader on many occasions, at times he has instead explained to his subordinates why he’s leadership behavior is different from the expected leadership behavior. Alan believes that sometimes you have to explain your behavior and why Swedish leaders are acting the way they do. Alan describes one situation when he had one of his sales representatives calling him about a client, who wanted 20% off a purchase, and the sales person asked Alan if he could offer the 20% discount to the client. Alan told the sales representative that he had never met the client and that he has no idea if the client deserves a 20% discount. Alan, who had introduced a bonus system based on how much discount the company provides their customers, told the sales person “if you feel that the customer deserves a 20% discount then you should give it to him. However, this will affect your bonus so it is a decision that you will have to make on your own” In that situation Alan felt that he was perceived as a very passive leader who could not make a decision. Therefore it was also important for him to explain that, in that particular case, it was better to make some decisions further out in the organization and thus by people closer to the customers. Alan believes that his subordinates can intellectually understand his behavior after he explains the reason for his actions, but he is convinced that the subordinates sometimes still perceive him as a weak leader, who is unable to make a proper decision.

Even though Alan think that it is important to adjust to the French culture he carefully points out the importance of never denying one’s own culture. “One must try to understand the foreign culture and try to adjust accordingly but one cannot give up the own values, or else one will not be a good leader”.

Alan does not directly experiences that he has been in situations in which he has had to compromise with his own values, but he has been in situations that have been rather discouraging. Alan mentions employee and trade union negotiation as one such situation. He describes such negotiations as if it is known already that the parties will never ever come to an agreement, that people just assume that any change processes are just humbug, and that there is always hidden funding and thus not really a need for cut backs or other changes. Alan has been very angry and upset that people do not trust him and his decisions. He explains that it is difficult, and discouraging, and at times very lonely to be a Swedish leader in France.

In the same time Alan feels that the Swedish context can be very boring, and in which people are quiet and impersonal. There is always tension in a French office with lots of drama and big personalities. “It’s like a scene at the theater”. Alan points out that if you like excitement and drama, it is fun to work in a French context as a leader, but is you instead is a sensitive person, who is scared of conflicts and gets stomach ache when people get mad at you, then it can be hell to work as Swedish leader in a French context. Alan reveals that he finds it
physically uncomfortable when people are fighting during a meeting. He further explains “the French find it very entertaining to argue and challenge someone’s opinion whereas Swedes tend to find it annoying and unpleasant to be questioned, they see it as a personal attack.”

During his time in France, Alan has also experienced that some of his French employees, at least the more open-minded ones, start to appreciate a more Swedish approach to leadership. In his experience, those employees have a difficult time going back to work for a more authoritarian leader.

Alan’s advice for future Swedish leaders in France is to first and foremost be interested in France and to learn more about the country. To learn the language is another important factor. Alan sees a lot of Swedish people who relocate to France during a couple of years, who simply do not care to learn the language. Alan explains that even if French is difficult to learn, it is important to try, as the language barrier will create a filter between the leader and the subordinates. It is also smart to learn about the new culture in order to be prepared for possible differences before departure. Last but not least Alan mentions that an allied, for example an assistant or someone else that you as a leader can trust, could be an important support. This person could act as a cultural interpreter between the leader and the subordinates.

4.2 Betty

The following narrative is told by Betty, a sales director in her 40s who is working for a French company in a technical industry. For her current position, Betty moved to Paris with her two children where they stayed for four years. Since the summer of 2009 Betty and her family moved back to Sweden and she commutes between the headquarter in Paris and her office in Sweden every other week. Betty explains that she never hesitated to apply for her current position since working abroad has always been a dream to her. At first she thought about working in the USA or England but then she realized that she wanted more of a challenge. Therefore when the position in France was available, Betty figured that it was an interesting challenge, however with some challenging consequences: “let’s face it, if I would have known before about everything that I would go through, both private to arrange the living conditions and with the work, I had probably never accepted the job”. But in the same time she also thinks that it is sort of the point of relocation as well, that you should not know everything beforehand. Betty did not really prepare for the relocation but she received assistance from the company through different consultants who helped her with practical details on site.

Betty didn’t know that much about the cultural differences, when it comes to leadership, between Sweden and France before she left Sweden. “That it’s more hierarchical, that I knew and that they are more formal”. Once in France, Betty noticed rather large differences in the French behavior compared to what she was used to in Sweden. First of all she was surprised over how the French kept their personal and private life so separated. In Sweden it is common to talk about people’s personal life over coffee while in France it is possible to work with somebody for many, many years without knowing anything at all about the person’s private life. Betty experienced this when one of her coworkers retired after working for more than 30 years in the company. Betty who was rather new at the company told the other, French managers that the retired woman was married and had a son who was 30 years old. The other managers, who had worked side by side with the retired woman for about the same number of years, had no idea. Betty experiences the reaching of consensus to be very important to
Swedish leaders. People discuss, make a list of possible problems, debate and try to find a consensus. French leadership is more about the leader constructing a plan is in his or her room, which is later presented to the team. “Here it has nothing to do with consensus; it is the leader who makes the decisions even if he doesn’t have the best ideas all the time”. Betty explains that problems do arise with time since the plan is not thought through and because information has not been considered from other departments in order to find the most solid plan. In general, Betty believes that Swedish leaders are more informal than French leaders. “In Sweden it wouldn’t be a problem for a factory worker to tell his opinion to the CEO if it was necessary, it wouldn’t be weird. In France, on the other hand, it is rarely occurring” In France information go through one hierarchical level to another and another. Betty concludes that the hierarchical levels are much more rigid in France than they are in Sweden. A final difference that Betty has noticed, both in other French leaders and in her subordinates, is that French employees are often very negative. “In a way they always see the glass as half empty” Sometimes Betty feels that this negative attitude is affecting her and that she consequently becomes more negative as well even though she wants to be positive.

Betty describes her leadership style as rather informal; she likes to reach a decision together with her coworkers. However, as she points out, she does not necessary have to reach consensus, but she wants to listen to the information and opinions of her coworkers before she makes a decision. Otherwise Betty explains that she tries to adjust her leadership after the people she is working with and the situation she ends up in. She describes her leadership as relatively Swedish but not completely Swedish. Betty was prepared that she might have to adjust her leadership to the French context, depending on how French people are working, but she wasn’t prepared to change as a person. “I figured that I got this job because of who I am and because of the work that I have previously done. I knew that I might have to adjust to certain policies, routines and social codes in France but I was rather strict regarding changing as a person. I am who I am”. But Betty admits that she of course also has to adjust her leadership to better suit the French context. Although she sees herself as a rather informal leader there are moments when she is behaving very formal; “One of my biggest clients is the French army” She explains that whenever she is in a meeting with the French army, she must behave very formal. There is a certain order for discussions and so on. Betty also experience that she is changing her behavior when she is dealing with very negative subordinates. In such situations she is trying to explain very carefully what it really is that they are trying to accomplish. She is coaching the group to change their focus and use the energy to find a solution instead.

In general Betty thinks that it is important to find a balance in the adjusted leadership. She does not believe in straight out copying the French leader behavior and she consider strictly keeping a Swedish leadership style in France just as unsuccessful. Instead she thinks it is more about finding a middle way. “The combination of Swedish and French leadership can take you rather far. I don’t believe that it is black or white so to speak, but I believe that we have to adjust and use the strengths that we have from Sweden and the things in France that are good” Betty is not of the opinion that copying French leader behavior could be a good idea. “I think that you would lose yourself as a leader because you wouldn’t be able to stand up for your leadership, and the question is if you would be respected for it?”

Betty cannot remember that she has experienced any difficulties in values or such when adjusting her leadership to the French context. However, she does explain that some norms in France have made France a much easier context for a highly positioned female leader. “I have never, ever been questioned in France about why I accepted this position. I have never been
questioned about why I have an aupair who helps me to take care of my children. I have never
been questioned about why I have someone who does my cleaning at home. No one has ever
asked me anything like that at all. They gave me a job and they expected me to deal with my
private situation on my own. They knew when I took the job that I was a single mother with
two children and that I planned to bring them to France. That was not something that stopped
them from offering me the job. I feel that it is a question that people would have asked me if I
would have applied for the same position in Sweden. In that aspect I felt that it was not about
changing my values, instead I got my values confirmed. That my situation was ok since I
often felt questioned in Sweden”. All in all, Betty experiences her staying in France as very liberating as she could escape the demands and expectations from the Swedish society. In the
same time, as she was not French, she could also in a way escape the expectations from the
French society. As a leader, this is something she noticed rather quickly; “people accepted
some of my behavior, which they might not have accepted from a French leader, since I
wasn’t French”.

One advice that Betty has for other Swedish leaders who are about to move to France is to
learn the language. “I think that it is important and much appreciated that you try to speak
French”

4.3 Christian

The following narrative is told by Christian, a general manager in his 40s who is working at a
Swedish industrial company. Christian has worked in the company for 22 years and he has
been sent to France by the company twice. The first time he was responsible for the expansion
of one of the company’s plats in France and later he was promoted to product manager. He
stayed for 3 years before returning to Sweden. The second time he was offered the position of
line manager and once in France he took over as Managing Director of the local company
within the Swedish group. Christian did not have any specific expectations on his first staying
in France. “I didn’t know much about France, I had barely been to France before so I didn’t
know much about how it would be”. Christian did not really prepare for the relocations other
than he participated in a language course and a two week visit in French host family prior to
departure. Once in France Christian noticed that there were a lot of differences between
Swedish and French leadership. “It was very different, in Sweden we have a lot of decision
that are made in consensus and we take a rather long time to make a decision. Whereas in
France, it is more the leader who makes the decision and he or she does not involve the
coworkers so much”. The second time that Christian moved to France he was more prepared
for some of the cultural differences in leadership. “Then I knew that the French had a more
distinct leadership than we had in Sweden. More distinct in the way that it is expected that the
leader would lead everybody, which has its advantages but it might also lead to the fact that
some opinions are not presented until later on”. Another difference that Christian has
experienced is that the leader in France could have rather feisty discussion with the team.
People would raise their voice, get angry or even slam their fist in the table. Then five
minutes later people could drink a cup of coffee together as if nothing had happened.
Christian points out that in France there is a difference between having different opinions and
not liking each other. Christian believes that in Sweden, if someone would slam their fist in the
table, people would be more upset and take it more personal. In general he thinks that
Swedes are more scared of conflicts than French people are. However, Christian believes that
it is difficult to say if what he has experienced during his staying in France was specific for
where he was or if it is possible to generalize a typical French behavior.
Christian describes his leadership behavior as depending on the individual that he should lead and how far he or she has come in his or her development. If Christian is the leader of an individual who is rather new in the position, he would spend more time with the person in order to coach and follow up. If the person is new at the job then Christian would be very clear and specific about the tasks whereas if the person worked for a longer time and have come further in his or her development Christian would be a more delegating leader.

Christian recalls that he thought that it was frustrating for him as a leader that the coworkers had such a negative attitude, as he experienced it. Especially when it came to changes in the organization. With time he understood that the negative attitude was part of how the French worked. Christian adjusted his leadership behavior to different situations of negative coworkers by first reflecting over if it was something that was actually important or simply something to accept and not care more about. In some situations Christian basically told the workers that “this is the way I think and you just have to accept that”. Although it is good to listen to peoples opinions there are situations that require informing people that this is the way it is going to be.

In Sweden Christian sees himself as a more delegating leader. He feels that he has adjusted his leadership behavior to better suit the French context. “In France I spend more time on following up and I steer more strictly than I have to do in Sweden. It was part of the culture that the leader should tell his opinion and direct, not only strategically but also operatively”. However, Christian is determined to highlight the fact that he believes that the changes that he made as a leader in France much depended on the individual subordinates that he was responsible for in France. “I am aware that it depended on the subordinate leaders that I had in France compared to the people I worked with in Sweden, how mature they were in their roles”. Christian experienced that he had some French managers under him who were maybe at the end of their competences and therefore they needed some more support. He felt that even if they were senior in their roles and had stayed in the company for a long time, they weren’t necessarily great at being managers and leaders. “It is possible that if I would have had managers who would have acted similar in their leadership in Sweden, then I would have had to act in a similar way. It is not necessarily a cultural difference but that is how I experienced it”.

Christian did not detect any direct difficulties in adjusting his leadership to the French context. Instead he experienced that he had some advantages as a Swedish leader in a Swedish owned company in France. “I had lots of contacts at the headquarter that I could use in one way or another since it is located in Sweden”. Christian felt that he could try to pick out the good parts in a Swedish leader style as well as a French leader style. He worked a lot over the years to try to decentralize the decision making and move more responsibility to the subordinates and the groups.

The first advice that Christian can give to other Swedish leaders who are about to relocate to France is to learn French. “If you don’t know the language you will have to work hard to communicate and there are parts of the culture that you can never really take in”. The second and equally important advice would be to spend time and money on learning about the new culture. It is important to understand the cultural differences between French and Swedes, how we think and act differently. “I remember the first time I took part in an intense debate and people was pissed off, I was shocked. I had no idea. It would have been easier to handle if I would have known that this is nothing weird, it doesn’t mean anything. It is a more powerful
way of expressing oneself that what we do in Sweden. It would have been valuable to know that before I left”.

4.4 David

The following narrative is told by David, an engineer in his late 40s who is working at a Swedish industrial company. Davis is currently working with strategic development but has had various leadership positions over the years within the company. In 2008 he was offered a position at one of the company’s plants in France where he was responsible for the group’s global processes such as IT, supply chain, customer service and purchases. He stayed for 2 years.

David feels that he had a positive attitude to France before he moved and that he felt that there weren’t so much to prepare before he left. Other than having a relocation consultant who helped with the apartment he did not really prepare in any way. “I didn’t have that much experience of how French companies work but I still had rather realistic expectations since I have many friends in France”. David noticed that many of his expectations about cultural differences, regarding leadership, between Sweden and France, were confirmed. He experienced that the French leadership is much more authoritarian than the Swedish leadership. “In France the subordinates are there for the leader whereas in Sweden the leader is there for the subordinates”. David thinks that the French perceive Swedes to be way too consensus oriented and therefore the decision-making in Swedish organizations is likely to be perceived as slow and vague. “The decisions have a tendency to slowly develop until everybody knows about them but the decision moments are not so clear as with a French leader who just decides that we should do like this!”. Another difference that David has noticed is that the French and French leaders are very detail oriented and far better than Swedes at mathematical details and elaborative models. “We usually joke about that a French baby on the first anniversary get as excel package as a gift, since they should start early”. The consequence for this sense for details is that French leaders are less outstanding when it comes to seeing the bigger picture or finding illogical factors since they are often too focused on the details to see the whole. “They see a lot of threes but not the forest”.

Davis describes his own leadership style as very consensus oriented. He tries to get the coworkers involved and to get them to feel that they are contributing. He is also actively encouraging and motivating his subordinates so that they feel empowered to work on their own. David identifies his leadership style as far more Swedish than French, and he believes that it is difficult for a leader to change from the leadership style that one has learnt from the home culture. “What a leader can do through awareness is to adjust the leadership but the leader has a sort of base style that he or she would go back to in a difficult moment”.

David is absolutely certain that there are moments when a Swedish leader must adjust his or her leadership. Personally, David has experienced situations where he has had to make a decision because the situation demanded it, even if he normally is more of a consensus striving leader. He describes the decision making a crucial factor for a Swedish leader in France since a leader in France would lose respect among the subordinates if he or she does not make decisions. The French employees perceive that the leader is there to make decisions and a leader who does not make decisions, is not doing his or her job. Around the time that Davis arrived there was a lot of organizing to do with the implementation of a new business system, which was confusing and difficult. During that time David recalls that he took many decisions without consulting anyone. He sometimes listened to opinions but mostly decided
how the different teams should move forward. “Sometimes in France if you have too many options you must step in and make a decision, whereas in Sweden the group would have reached the decision on its own”.

David has never experienced any personal difficulties when adjusting his leadership style to the French context. He believes that this is due to the fact that France is culturally just about as different as you can get from Sweden on many levels, such as the power distance. The difference is very big but it also makes it visible. And what is visible is easier to handle. David thinks that the adjustment is worse when Swedes experience that they are more alike the host culture, as with Americans. “We think that we are so similar and that this won’t be a problem”. But according to David it can lead to many misunderstandings and frustration just because we think that we are alike, when in fact we are not. David concludes that that could be a reason to why it is rather simple for a Swedish leader to adjust to the French culture “In a way we have an advantage in that it is so visible that we are different. It makes it so much easier for everybody to realize that these differences must be dealt with”.

David believes that there are advantages to being a Swedish leader in France, not the least when it comes to tolerance for our behavior. “The expectations on me as a Swedish leader are very different from the expectations on a French leader. The subordinates have this expectation that the French leader should make decisions but on the other hand when the Swedish leader arrives, no matter his abilities, this leader is a bit of an exotic creature. This means that they have more tolerance in many ways”. David is of the opinion that it will never happen that a Swedish leader will be accepted as French in France. Instead Swedish leaders are exotic and should be open about it and try to use it as an advantage. David explains that a Swedish leadership behavior can contribute with a lot in the French context, such as more strategic thinking and helicopter perspective. David admits that sometimes it was easier to keep a bit of a more Swedish leadership behavior since he was working for a Swedish company in France.

David’s advice to other Swedish leader who are about to move to France is to participate in some sort of cultural training, as it is important to be aware of the cultural differences that exists. In addition, David points out the importance of learning the language. David is convinced that by showing that you are learning the language and simply by using some standard phrases, you as a leader will show that you are making an effort.

4.5 Erica

The following narrative is told by Erica, a regional director in her early 40s who is working at a Swedish company in the forest industry. Erica has had various leadership positions in France, where she lives since well over a decade. Over the more recent years Erica has had a lot of contact with Swedes and Swedish teams within the company.

Erica moved to France on her own initiative, she had met the love of her life and thought that Sweden was too boring. She was ready to see more of the world. As a consequence she explains that she did not really prepare for the work aspect of the relocation but instead more of life in France in general. At the time she moved to France, EU-members could not move as they wished between other member states. She describes that her preparation consisted of improving her French and reading French newspaper in order to stay updated.
Erica knew a bit about differences between Swedish and French managers before she came to France as she had written a thesis on cultural differences in the habits of Swedish and French managers. She expected the French leader to be a bit of a snob whereas the Swedish leader is more down to earth.

Erica experience that there are a lot of cultural differences between Sweden and France that affect her leadership behavior. Erica came to France with her mind set on a more Swedish style of handling things. “I thought that we would work as a team, that we are loyal to the team and that we take responsibility, just as I was used to work in Sweden”. However, she learnt pretty fast that a Swedish leadership style did not work quite as good in France since it was not what French people expected. “First of all they expected more instructions, more direct descriptions of how things should be, and then they expected me to make all the decisions”. Erica explains that she was more used to her teams collectively making decisions even in front of the leader, as it is important in Sweden that everybody is onboard. Erica also experiences that as a leader in France it is quite difficult to get people to do their tasks and it is necessary as a leader to continuously follow up that things get done. “When I worked in Sweden people felt a sense of pride to accomplish their tasks and maybe even a bit more than their delegated tasks, something that is not obvious here. I can’t say that French people are lazy but they don’t have the same sense of responsibility and pride in having tasks delegated to them”.

Erica describes her usual leadership style as very open and typically Swedish. The experience of tasks that were not executed unless Erica as a leader specifically followed up and controlled that they in fact were executed has led Erica to adjust her leadership style to the French cultural context. “I could not understand why they would not do what I had told them to do which made me become very directive, I adopted an opposite leadership style” Erica experience that she as a leader has become more strict and she has learnt to set more clear rules. She has also learnt to keep a greater distance to her coworkers. “As a leader you cannot become to much of a friend to your French subordinates, this they will take advantages of pretty fast”. Erica describe that she as a leader went from being more of a team member to being a team leader who keeps her distance and get respected. “If you ever give them a finger they will take the whole arm. That is one of the most important experiences that have changed my behavior as a leader; it has restrained my leadership style”. Erica specifically remember when her company was about to put in place a new process which she was responsible for. She held meetings where she and the teams discussed how they should work and Erica made sure that everybody had understood what they were supposed to do. After a few months of checking up Erica assumed that everybody knew what they were supposed to do and that they also did what they were supposed to do. One day an external auditor came to review the process. Erica explained that everybody respected the procedure and did what they were supposed to do, that she had made sure of that. As the external auditor reviewed the process it became clear that no one followed the procedure and did what they were supposed to do. The subordinates’ initial efforts had stopped with the regular check ups from Erica. “I was so shocked. All I could do was to start over and be more authoritarian”. Erica has also learnt that there is no point as a leader to try to reach consensus in discussions since “it will never happen, the French will kill anything with their discussions” Erica explains that the French are not only very talkative, they are also very negative and complain about everything. “With time I noticed that I had to put an end to the discussions, I almost felt like the Wailing wall”

Erica is aware that she as a leader has adjusted her leadership style to a certain extent in France. However, she points out that it is important that the leader does not try to become
something that he or she is not. Then the leadership will never be natural so the adjustment of
ones leader behavior must be inline with who the leader is as a person. “I will not become a
French leader just because I speak French. But it is important to learn about certain things,
like how to treat conflicts or how to stop the endless discussions”. Erica believes that it is both
important and appreciated among French subordinates for a Swedish leader to adjust to the
French culture while retaining his or her Swedish side. Erica is convinced that many
subordinates are disappointed when Swedish leaders return home to Sweden. Erica feels that
her Swedish way of noticing the individual has worked to her advantage in France. Even
though you cannot give too much freedom to the French subordinates you can still see and
take into account their individual situations, she explains. That they are not used to from a
French leader and therefore people can become more loyal to me as a Swedish leader.

At times Erica experienced the adjustment as a leader as tough, especially the expectations on
her as a leader to make every single decision. Erica felt that she sometimes waited to long to
make decisions, which led her to find herself in many conflicts. “It’s been difficult to become
tougher, but it becomes easier with age. My personal maturity makes it easier for me to put
my foot down”.

The advice that Erica can give to other Swedish leader who relocating to France is to learn the
language. “You will never get the same contact or respect if you do not learn the language.” It
is also good to be tougher and less naïve as a Swedish leader in France: you must be thick
skinned and get angry. Sometimes it is necessary to show that you are fuming and not
indifferent as Swedes are often perceived”.

4.6 Fred

The following narrative is told by Fred, a production manager is in his early 40s who is
working for a Swedish company in the mechanical industry. In 2005 Fred was offered a
management position at one of the company’s sites in France, where he would be responsible
for R&D and process development. He stayed in France for 3,5 years.

Fred did not really know what to expect of the relocation before departure. He thought that it
was exciting to try something different and that the assignment was an unexpected challenge.
Fred confess that he was a bit skeptical towards France before departure but that it was more
based on a general perception than facts.

Fred experiences that he was rather well prepared for his new position before he left Sweden.
Fred and his wife had been visiting France and the new workplace. The company organized a
day of cultural training for both Fred and his wife in order to prepare them for the French
culture. Fred reason that it is impossible to fully prepare for everything before an expatriation
and that some things must be dealt with once installed in France. The one thing that Fred
regrets in terms of preparations is that there was not enough time to study French before he
left.

The main perceptions of differences between Swedish and French leaders that Fred had
before departure was that it is more hierarchical in France. Once in France Fred experienced
more of the importance of titles and hierarchy. Every decision should be channeled trough
managers higher up in the hierarchy. He explains that it was difficult as a leader to get
feedback on a proposition. “You do like the leader says even if you think that the idea is
lousy. I had to work hard to make them understand that I wanted direct and honest feedback
form them and that I did not mind if they did not like my ideas”. Fred point out that once the people are on a similar level in the hierarchy the discussions can be very challenging and as a consequence the meetings are more entertaining.

Fred describes his leadership style as rather Swedish. He works a lot with the group and strives to establish a good sense of team belonging. Fred explains that he wants to be challenged by his subordinates’ trough feedback on his ideas. He tries to encourage people to let him know their opinions even if he might be the one who ends up making the decision.

Fred experiences that he had to adjust his behavior as a leader in France. In Sweden Fred used to discuss propositions with his team and then leave it to the team to further develop these ideas. In France Fred had to have more clear initial discussions and his French subordinates wanted more clear instructions, preferably in writing. In France where intense discussions are common, Fred had to learn how to take more space and push for his own opinions. “I had to stand up for myself in another way than I have had to in Sweden”. He also had to adjust to the hierarchy at more than one occasion. Fred remembers when the French office should be changed into an open space office. Fred wanted everybody to be placed in the open space but he simply had to accept the fact that it was impossible for the leader to not have an own office, especially if Fred’s replacement would be French. “It would be completely impossible for the leader to sit in an open space office with the subordinates”.

When it comes to adjusting his leadership behavior Fred reasons that “we are who we are and we cannot change our personalities”. He admits that sometimes he had to adjust his behavior in situations in France that required a different behavior but he points out that the cultural differences should not be exaggerated either. “Not only is it difficult to change who I am as a person but I also did not feel a need to change it. I experienced that I was appreciated for my leadership style and the leadership that I brought. Sometimes it was difficult but then we had to try to talk about it. After a while you start to experience the differences as something positive”.

Fred does not experience that the adjustment that he has made as a leader have been particularly difficult. He thinks that it is important to be aware of the differences that exist between the host and home country and how different behaviors are valued in another country. “It is important to know that if I act like this it will be perceived like that” Fred explains that he had a really good superior, a woman in the same age as him who had worked in different countries. She gave Fred feedback on his behavior. “Given that I got that feedback and thus was aware of differences that existed, I knew how to behave or act in the new environment. You learn new things at work all the time and the culture become one such new thing that you learn. Then I would have to see how me and my personality fit into the context. What do I have to work on and when does it suit to be me?”

Fred also experienced that Sweden and the Swedes are perceived in a positive manner in France. He believes that the culture of the Swedish company probably affected the organizational culture quite a bit, even if the workplace was a French acquisition. “There was a positive attitude to Swedish leadership. Even if subordinates think that it is comfortable that most things are handled by managers, they thought that it is convenient to talk directly the whoever you would want to talk to without getting to caught up in hierarchical levels.”

One advice from Fred to other Swedish leaders who relocate to Franc is to learn the language. He also points out the importance to have a person in the organization who can give you
feedback on your behavior, a person who dares to be honest and to criticize. “Because of the hierarchy in France people would never dream about giving me feedback as a leader. Therefore it is important to have someone on the side to provide input on things that you must be aware of.”

4.7 Gabriella

The following narrative is told by Gabriella, a management consultant in her mid 30s who is working at a Swedish Industrial company in France. Gabriella has been part of the management team of a big project for 1.5 years, she is currently on maternity leave. When Gabriella and her husband, who is also working in the company, were offered the opportunity to go abroad, she felt that it would be an exciting experience. Before departure neither Gabriella nor her husband spoke French but the company arranged language classes as part of their preparation for France. In addition to the language classes, the company also arranged a day of cultural training in order to prepare them for the staying in France. Gabriella explains that she was happy with the preparations that the company assisted with before departure, “I truly feel that the company did everything that they could”.

Before departure Gabriella expected leadership in France to be different from leadership in Sweden. She expected France to be more hierarchical and that it would be difficult to communicate and understand the decision making process. Despite these expectations Gabriella tried to stay open-minded. “I did have these notions of how things would be but I tried to not let them rule my behavior. I tried to not insist in how I am as a Swede but to listen and slightly adjust in order to fit in”. Today Gabriella experiences that leadership in France indeed is very hierarchical. She explains that it can be very difficult to get a decision through. “One must turn to the right person without skipping any person in the hierarchy. It is necessary to deal with things in the right forum in order to have decisions taken”.

Gabriella describes her own leadership as rather direct. She explains that she is trying to be humble and listen to her subordinates but that she is not scared of bringing things up to discussion whenever she feels that it is necessary. On one hand Gabriella listens to her subordinates and tries to get them to take their own initiatives but in the same time she can also be quite driving.

Gabriella experiences that she has adjusted her leadership in France. She feels that she has been forced to take part in discussions in a different manner in France compared to in Sweden. “If you want something said you cannot be afraid to interrupt. This I’m not really used to from back home, you don’t interrupt someone”. In the same time Gabriella also feels that she has become more reserved in France. She has learnt to be more adaptable and is more scared of offending people.

Gabriella remembers a situation when she was new at the office and she asked her colleagues for help in order to get started in her new position. Later she found out that it was not really appreciated in the French office to ask for assistance. “You’re not supposed to ask for help here. You should be able to handle your job and it is not perceived as strength here to ask for help as it can be in Sweden”. In general Gabriella experiences that she has met different expectations from her French colleagues than what she was used to from Sweden. “But I don’t know if it is typical French or because of my situation which is a bit different. I rather
got the role of the wife instead of an individual. My husband had the important assignment, even if I have been very important for my project”.

Gabriella does not experience any direct difficulties in adjusting her leadership behavior to the French context. “I think that I am very able to adjust. I have not experienced the adjustment as a big issue but I have adjusted. Even a bit when it comes to my own values”. Gabriella explains that sometimes it has been frowned upon when she has worked overtime since she and her husband is not equal at their workplace. At a few occasions Gabriella had to work in Sweden and then her husband had to leave work early to pick up their daughter. “It has been questioned. In a way it is the woman who is supposed to take care of the children”. Gabriella experiences that it is difficult to go against one’s own values since it is important to stay true to oneself and not sell out oneself. On the other hand it is important to be able to understand the new culture. “Femininity and masculinity is a big question for values. I want my work to be just as important as my husbands, no matter what position he is in. That was part of the deal a bit for me, since I did not want to leave our daughter for 10-11 hours a day, to put myself and my career a bit to the side. It is easier to deal with because we won’t live here forever. I don’t want to be too much of a housewife”.

Gabriella describes Swedes to be very informal in their leadership which she believes is not always suitable in France. She experiences that French leaders are not very considerate of their subordinates. Gabriella believes in taking a bit of the Swedish culture and a bit of the French culture in order to obtain a great collaboration between the two countries. Gabriella has been the mediator between a French team and a Swedish team in the project and she thinks that it is a big mistake to ignore the importance of intercultural training for teams who are working with foreign teams. She explains that it is important to highlight the differences that exist. “If you understand the differences and are open about them then it is easier to handle the different situations that occur. You don’t have to like everything about the other culture but you must be open for the differences that exist. At times it is very frustrating but it is so much easier if we can understand each other, that when we do this then we think like that. There is so much to win from understanding each other.”

Therefore the most important advice that Gabriella has for other Swedish leaders who are relocating to France is to learn more about the foreign culture.
5. Analysis

In this chapter the Swedish leaders’ experiences of the adjustment process will be analyzed in three parts. I will start by a shorter summary and first interpretation of the empirical data, by looking at each narrative in order to find the main plot, message or attitude towards the adjustment process that represent the experience of the leader, based on my research questions. In the second part I will through a thematic approach look at the common and distinctive elements in the leaders experience, based on my research questions. I will then compare them to the existing theory in an attempt to find an explanation to the events and experiences. Finally I will look at less prominent patterns across the leaders different experiences in order to obtain the broadest possible image of the Swedish leaders’ adjustment process from multiple angles.

5.1 Summary and first interpretation of the narratives

5.1.1 Alan

- Alan describes himself as rather naïve regarding his expectations on the cultural differences in leadership between Sweden and France and he is surprised over how little time he spent to prepare for being a leader in France. Alan self-initiated the expatriation.
- Alan identifies his leadership to at least have been very Swedish. He has a low-key leadership style and he strives to decentralize decision-making.
- Once in France Alan learnt more about the hierarchy in France, for example, that a leader cannot be too close to the subordinates and that the leader must make more individual decisions.
- Alan has had to become more French in his leadership, but at times he has instead chosen to explain his leadership behavior to his subordinates.
- Alan thinks that it is important as a leader to adjust to the host culture, however, without denying the home culture and giving up the own values.
- Alan has not experienced any situations when he has had to compromise with his own values in France but at times he has experienced the cultural differences as rather discouraging. In the same time Alan has also received positive reactions to his Swedish leadership among his French subordinates.

A clear message from Alan’s experience of the adjustment process is the importance of preparation since there will be cultural differences to deal with for the Swedish leader. Alan has adjusted when it has been necessary but he has meanwhile tried to introduce a more Swedish leadership style. Even though Alan mention positive things with the French leadership it is clear that Alan perceives the Swedish leadership style as superior since he deliberately tried to implement his Swedish leadership behavior to the French team.

5.1.2 Betty

- Betty did not really prepare for her relocation to France but she reasons that there is also a point with not knowing everything beforehand.
- Betty identifies her leadership as relatively Swedish; she is informal and likes to reach decisions together with her subordinates.
• In France Betty noticed that the leadership is instead very formal and she experienced that the French subordinates have a very negative attitude.
• As a consequence Betty noticed that she also became negative so she had to adjust her behavior in order to change the focus of her team. She also had to adjust her behavior to become more formal.
• Betty thinks that it is necessary to adjust to another culture but that it is important to not change as a person. Betty was not prepared to change as a person since she felt that she got the job for whom she is and what she has done before.
• Betty cannot remember that she experienced the adjustment process as particularly difficult. Instead she rather see the French environment as liberating as she as a Swedish leader in France can escape expectations from the Swedish society while not either have to deal with the expectations from the French society since she is not French.

Betty has a rather reluctant attitude to the adjustment of her leadership behavior. She has deliberately only adjusted when it has been absolutely necessary and has had the approach from the beginning that she got the job because of who she is. Betty is adjusting her behavior when she has to but is to the greatest extent possible behaving according to a more Swedish leadership style. This might have worked well for Betty since she is Swedish and the French expect, and are more tolerating of, a different behavior from her. Therefore it might be easier for her as a Swede to introduce and use a more democratic leadership style.

5.1.3 Christian

• Christian prepared for his relocation through his participation in language courses and a two weeks stay in France prior to departure in order to learn a bit about French culture.
• Christian describes his leadership behavior to be very dependent on the individual subordinate and the specific needs that he or she might have.
• In France Christian noticed that the leadership in France was much more distinctive and that the French subordinates often had a negative attitude.
• As a consequence Christian adjusted his leadership behavior to better suit the French context, for example, similarly to a French leader Christian started to steer more strictly and spent more time following up on tasks and subordinates.
• Christian did not experience any direct difficulties in adjusting to the French context. Instead he experienced some advantages of being a Swedish leader in France with connections at the Swedish head quarter. During the expatriation Christian tried to decentralize the decision-making and bring more responsibility out to the groups.

Christian has somewhat of a mixed attitude to the adjustment of his behavior as a leader. On one hand he has adjusted his leadership behavior to in situations where it has been necessary but he has also tried to introduce a more Swedish way of leading the subordinates. It is more difficult to draw conclusions from Christian’s experience since he is cautious to explain certain differences to depend solely on culture.

5.1.4 David

• David did not really prepare before his relocation but he still had some notions of the cultural differences between Sweden and France when it comes to leadership.
• David identifies his own leadership style as far more Swedish than French as he is a very consensus oriented leader who empowers his subordinates to work on their own.
• In France David learned about the importance of single-handedly making a decision as a leader in France since the leader who does not make decisions is not doing his or her job.
• As a consequence there were times when David, for example, had to adjust to the French context and make decisions without consulting anyone, even if he is normally more of a consensus oriented leader.
• David reasons that it is difficult to change a leadership style that one has learnt from the home culture but that it is possible to adjust through awareness. David did not experience the adjustment as especially difficult, partly due to that the company was Swedish. Sometimes David just had to realize that things were different in France even though he had a hope of changing things to a more Swedish way.
• David believes that French subordinates are more tolerant towards a Swedish leader in France and he experienced positive reaction on his Swedish leadership in France.

David has somewhat of a hesitant attitude to the adjustment of his leadership behavior in the French context. He has adjusted his leadership but not more than what is necessary since he believes that some part of the Swedish leadership is very important. The tolerance of a Swedish leader’s behavior in France might facilitate the introduction of a more democratic leadership, which could be difficult for a French leader to introduce since the expectations of a French leader are different.

5.1.5 Erica

• Erica was aware of certain cultural differences between Sweden and France before she moved to France even though she did not properly prepare for the move to France. However, she had not anticipated how much the cultural differences could affect her leadership. Erica self-initiated her expatriation.
• In France Erica initially led her subordinates after the leadership behavior that she was used to in Sweden. She expected to reach a consensus in discussions and she gave her subordinates a great deal of freedom since she expected them to feel responsible and loyal to the team.
• Erica had to learn the hard way that the Swedish leadership style was not really appropriate in the French context since her behavior was so different from the behavior that the French subordinates were used to.
• As a consequence Erica had to drastically adjust her leadership from being more of an open and easygoing leader to a more authoritarian and directive leader.
• Erica is of the opinion that the leader should adjust his or her behavior to the new context, however to a limited extent as it is important that the adjusted behavior still reflects who the leaders is as a person. In the same time Erica describes adjustments in her leadership behavior that she has experienced as difficult. One example of such a difficulty is the trust that Erica has shown to some of her subordinates only to later discover that she could in fact not at all trust these subordinates.
• Erica can also detect certain advantages with a more Swedish leader behavior among the French subordinates, despite the numerous difficulties of being a Swedish leader in France. Even though she has learnt to not become too much of a friend to her subordinates she has experienced a very positive reaction for her caring leadership style which has resulted in a certain loyalty among her subordinates.
Even though Erica had to learn the hard way that she had to adjust her Swedish leadership to the French context, it is clear that she still tries to keep part of her Swedish leadership, which is also seems to be appreciated among her French subordinates. Erica’s adjustment has been rather difficult at times and it is likely that a better preparation could have eased the adjustment through increased understanding.

5.1.6 Fred

- Fred experienced that he was rather well prepared for the assignment in France before departure and since he had received cultural training before departure he was also aware of some of the cultural differences between Sweden and France.
- Fred identifies his own leadership style as rather Swedish as he is very team oriented and participative in that he values the input from his subordinates.
- As a typical Swedish leader Fred had some difficulties with the French hierarchy. For example, he had to work really hard to get his subordinates to understand that he valued their opinions, even if they were different from his own.
- As a consequence there were times when Fred had to adjust his leadership behavior in France. He had to go from a more informal leader, who was part of the team, to a more directive leader, who could not be part of the team in the same way that he was used to in Sweden.
- When it comes to adjusting one’s leadership behavior Fred reasons that is it difficult to change who we are. Fred did not feel a need to change as a person in France even if he at times had to adjust his behavior to the French context. Fred did not experience the adjustment as particularly difficult; instead he sees the learning of a new culture and how to adjust accordingly as a thing like any other that you learn at work.
- Fred also experienced a positive attitude to Swedish leadership among the French subordinates. Even though it was comfortable for the subordinates that the leader handled most things, it was also convenient to have a bit more freedom that came with a Swedish leader.

Fred’s experience reflects a rather reluctant attitude towards the adjustment of his leadership behavior and he deliberately tried to bring a Swedish leadership to France. However there were moments when Fred had to have a feeling for what was possible or not through a Swedish leadership and what the French subordinates were ready to handle. Fred’s preparation before departure and the important mentor he had on place in France are likely to have helped him accept the times when he has had to adjust his behavior.

5.1.7 Gabriella

- Gabriella experiences that she was well prepared for her relocation to France. She had studied cultural differences between Sweden and France and she tried to stay open-minded to the differences in order to learn and adjust to fit in.
- Gabriella describes her own leadership to be rather direct. She listens to her subordinates and encourages them to take their own initiatives but she is not scared to bring issues up for discussion whenever necessary.
- Gabriella experiences that she has adjusted her leadership behavior in France. On one hand she has become more reserved and adaptable since she is scared to offend people. On the other hand she has also become more direct, for example when it come
to discussions where she takes more space and has learnt about interrupting people if she wants something said.

- When it comes to adjusting her leadership behavior, Gabriella feels that the adjustment is not a big issue for her, as she believes that she is very able to adjust, even slightly when it comes to her own values. Gabriella explains that it is difficult to go against our own values and that it is important to stay true to oneself but in the same time it is necessary to understand the host culture.

- The expectations on Gabriella as a leader and as a mother have brought up some questions of values. In her specific situation Gabriella has put herself and her career a bit to the side but she experiences that it is easier to deal with since it is during a limited amount of time.

Gabriella represents a rather relaxed attitude to the adjustment process. Although she thinks that it is important to stay true to oneself she also thinks that it is important to understand the host culture. It is possible that Gabriella’s thorough preparation has eased her adjustment process and her attitude towards it. It seems like the most difficult adjustment for Gabriella has been on a personal level when she tried to live a Swedish family life in France. Her coworkers’ expectations reflect the notion of work before family in France.

5.2 Analysis of the Swedish leaders’ adjustment process

In this second part I will through a thematic approach look at the common or distinctive elements in the leaders’ experience, based on my two research questions, and compare them to the existing theory in an attempt to find an explanation to the events and experiences. I have chosen a thematic approach, which is more concerned with theorizing across cases, in order to highlight what is essential in my material. Another reason to why I chose to include a thematic approach is my wish to facilitate the understanding of the reader by avoiding repetitions. My first research question for this study concern the expectations of the Swedish leaders and the aim is that this question helps provide the reader with a more thorough understanding of the expatriate leader’s adjustment process as a whole.

What expectations did Swedish leaders have on the expatriation and adjustment process before departure?

I will start by looking at the Swedish leaders’ expectations and how they prepared for the expatriation according to these expectations. I will turn to the existing theories to see if they can provide an explanation to the events or behaviors of the leaders.

5.2.1 Expectations

The majority of the respondents did not really have any specific expectations of the expatriation before departure. Christian describes that he did not really know what to expect since he had barely been to France before. Alan remembers that he was rather naive in his expectations the first time he went to France. David and Erica both had an overall positive attitude to France but not really any expectations. Fred and Gabriella both thought that the expatriation would be an exciting experience and a challenge. Finally Betty was excited to work abroad since it had always been a dream of hers.

Previous literature explains that the expatriate’s expectations on the assignment and the life in
the new culture are directly affecting the cultural adjustment that the expatriate go through (Caliguri et al, 2001, p. 366). Accurate expectations diminishes insecurities and negative reactions, which in turn can contribute to an effective cultural adjustment (Black et al, 1991, p. 305).

It is interesting to learn about the Swedish leaders expectations before departure since it is reasonable to assume that people tend to prepare according to their expectations. The Swedish leaders in this study did not really have any expectations, which could be explained by their lack of proper preparation as well.

5.2.2 Preparations

Given the attention the importance of preparation, and cultural training in particular, has been given in the expatriate literature it can seem surprising that the majority of the relocated Swedish leaders did not go through a proper preparation before departure. Gabriella is the only leader who was prepared through both cultural training and language classes. Two other leaders participated in cultural training (Fred) and language classes (Christian) respectively. The main argument for cultural training as preparation is that it allows individuals to better adjust to their new culture and therefore be more effective in their new roles (Caliguri et al, 2001, p. 358). It is thus understandable why Gabriella, Fred and Christian’s respective companies spend time and money on cultural and/or language training.

Alan and Erica are the two leaders who have spent the longest amount of time in France and neither one of them prepared for the cultural differences that would affect them as leaders. Alan explains that he was not at all prepared for the cultural differences in leadership between Sweden and France at the time when he was offered his first manager position in France. One might understand the lack of preparation in Alan’s case through the assumption that the awareness of cultural differences and their importance was not as known by the time when Alan first relocated to France. This conclusion cannot the least be drawn since most of the expatriate preparation literature appeared more recently. Nevertheless, Alan is still surprised over how little time he spent on preparing for being a leader in France and how little time people who are going abroad in general spend on learning about culture and adjustment. Erica, who did not prepare for the cultural differences that could affect her as a leader, did not know what to expect of her French subordinates. As a consequence, she has had some abrupt awakenings in France where she been forced to adjust her leadership behavior to the French context. One of the objectives of cultural training includes the understanding of which behavior to execute or suppress in a given situation in the host country in order to in advance determine appropriate behavior in the host country (Black & Mendelhall, 1990, p. 124). It therefore seems reasonable to assume that cultural training could have better prepared Erica for her new work environment and perhaps it also could have somewhat eased Erica’s earlier experiences as a leader in France.

David and Betty practically prepared for their relocation but they did not particularly prepare for the cultural differences in leadership between Sweden and France. David felt that he had a rather positive attitude towards France and that there was not that much to prepare before departure. Betty reasoned that it is somewhat the point with relocation as well, that you should not know everything before hand. In the expatriate literature, cross-cultural training has been identified as a means to facilitating effective cross-cultural interactions and cultural adjustment (Caligiuri et al, 2001, p. 358) Both David and Betty relocated rather recently to France, whilst the awareness of cultural differences and their importance has been ever so
high, and therefore their lack of cultural training can seem surprising, especially since the home companies did help to prepare their leaders practically by providing relocation assistance.

There could be several reasons to why David and Betty’s companies respectively did not offer their expatriated leaders any training at all. Lack of time and the temporary nature of the international assignment are possible explanations to the lack of pre-departure training. Doubted effectiveness of cultural training is another possible reason. Even though expatriate training is becoming more and more customary in many companies today, there are still certain doubts concerning the effectiveness of such training. And maybe by all rights as there seems to be a lack of clear evidence for the effectiveness of cultural training.

While some studies have found a positive influence on cultural training on expatriate adjustment (Selmer, 2002, p.83; Waxin & Panaccio, 2005, p.57) other researchers have found no influence, or indeed a negative impact of cultural training and expatriate adjustment (Kealey & Protheroe, 1996, p.162; Puck et al, 2008, p.2192).

Despite the fact that the majority of the Swedish leaders did not particularly prepare for the cultural differences between Sweden and France which could affect them as leaders, many of the leaders (Alan, David, Fred and Gabriella) specifically mention cultural learning as an advice for other Swedish leaders who are about to relocate to France. This advice from the two leaders who have experienced the effects that cultural training has had on their adjustment process, in combination with the same advice from two leaders who seemingly wish that they had participated in cultural training prior to their adjustment process, could be seen as a rather clear indication that cultural training is perceived to have a positive effect on the leader’s adjustment process. Almost all leaders also mention learning the language as an advice for future Swedish expatriates since it will allow the leader to become closer to the subordinates and take part of the host culture on another level. Finally Alan and Fred also point out the advantages of an ally in the host country, who could work as a cultural interpreter and support.

How do the Swedish leaders experience that their leadership should be adjusted, to the French context, from an outward, as well as inward perspective?

In an attempt to provide the reader with a more thorough understanding of how the Swedish leaders experienced that their leadership should be adjusted to the French context, I will start by looking at how the Swedish leaders describe their leadership. I will thereafter look at the main cultural differences, regarding leadership between Sweden and France, that they experience have had an impact on their leadership. I will then look at how the Swedish leaders experienced that they had to adjust their leadership to the French context and their attitudes to adjustment in general. Finally I will look at possible difficulties, as well as advantages, that the Swedish leaders experienced during the adjustment. Throughout these paragraphs I will also turn to the existing theories to see if they can provide an explanation to the events or behaviors of the leaders.

5.2.3 The leadership style of the Swedish leaders

When the leaders were asked to describe their leadership behavior most of the leaders (with the exception of Christian and Gabriella) indentified their leadership as typically Swedish or rather Swedish. However all the leaders described their leadership style through characteristics that are usually associated with a Swedish leadership. Previous research has
found evidence that there is a typical Swedish leadership style which is team-oriented and participative and where the leader should be able to build, integrate, coordinate and sustain a team in which the members collaborate in a collegial and egalitarian manner Holmström & Åkerblom (2006,p.320). Furthermore Swedish leaders are described as very informal (Gesteland,2005,p.301) and consensus-oriented in their decision making (Edström & Jönsson, 1998,p.167). The Swedish leaders in my study have described their own leadership style by one, two or all three of the following characteristics, and therefore a Swedish leadership style for this study can be identified as:

Participative: The Swedish leader is very consensus-oriented and is often consulting the subordinates since he or she values their opinions.

Informal: The Swedish leader is very informal in comparison with the more hierarchical French leaders. The Swedish leader is also described as very open and delegating.

Considerate and personal: The Swedish leader is also very considerate since he or she tend to be good at listening to, and encouraging, the subordinates as well as care for them as persons.

The typical Swedish leadership style is very coherent with the leadership style of the Swedish leaders of this study. The characteristics of the participating Swedish leaders’ leadership style indicate that their leadership style is quite relationship oriented in that it is supportive and participative. The literature explains that the characteristics of a Swedish leadership, with its strong notion of the collective, have emerged through the long political tradition of social democracy and the strong labor unions in Sweden (Holmberg & Åkerlund ,2007,p.33). This study shows that this can still today be reflected in the characteristics of the leadership style of the leaders in this study.

5.2.4 The cultural differences in leadership

There are several cultural differences in leadership between Sweden and France according to the respondents. As I went through the narrated experiences of the participating leaders a few sub-themes inductively emerged over the major cultural differences between Sweden and France that have affected the leadership behavior of the Swedish leaders in France. I will now present the main cultural differences that the Swedish leaders have adjusted their leadership behavior according to.

Individual decision-making

The main difference that all the Swedish leaders have directly or indirectly mentioned is the individual decision making in France. To come as leader from Sweden, where most decisions are made in consensus with the subordinates, the hierarchy and the individual decision-making in France represents quite the contrast. Betty explains; “here it has nothing to do with the time’’. This individual decision-making has had consequences for the Swedish leaders in France. In France the leader is there to make decisions and if the leader does not make any clear decision, then no decision will be made at all (Alan) or the leader will be perceived to not do his or her job (David). This cultural difference could be further explained by Schwartz’s (1999,p.27f) findings, which suggest that in a hierarchical culture such as France, the unequal distribution of power is not only legitimate but also expected. Fred explains that it was difficult as a leader to get feedback from the subordinates because of the hierarchy and
therefore he had to make a lot of decisions on his own. French leadership is described in the literature as very hierarchical and centralized and as a consequence the leaders do not have to consult with colleagues or others at various levels of the organization when making a decision (Castel et al, 2007, p. 548ff). For Swedes the strict hierarchy and individual decision-making in France can seem ineffective and complicated, however, according to the Swedish leaders experiences it is important to respect this hierarchy and traditional leadership behavior.

The negativity of the French subordinates

Another cultural difference that the Swedish leaders in France have experienced (Alan, Betty, Christian & Erica) and that is not mentioned in the literature is the negativity of the French subordinates. Betty explains; “in a way they always see the glass as half empty”. Erica also found this negativity and complaining from the French subordinates very frustrating, to the point that she sometimes felt like the Wailing Wall since the complaints would never stop. Similarly, many of the Swedish leaders (Alan, Betty, Erica, Fred & Gabriella) also mention that the French subordinates are very talkative and that the discussions are much more aggressive in France where people have to interrupt each other in order to say something. Alan explains that he as a Swede experiences the aggressiveness in French discussions as very uncomfortable, whereas the French experience arguments as amusing and not at all as personal attacks. This behavior with love for discussions and the aggressiveness is in the literature explained as a consequence of the French educational system in which debating and persuasive writing is systematically practiced. In France it is valued that individuals can say exactly what they mean or feel in a concise, direct manner. (Castel et al., 2007, p. 566f) It may seem as the subordinates complaining and aggressive discussions are somewhat contradictory to the strict respect for the hierarchy in France. For example, previous research has described subordinates in a high power distance culture, such as France, as more reluctant to challenge or express disagreement with their supervisor (Adsit et al., 1997, p. 394). It is possible that the negativity and the talkative side of the French subordinates is a consequence of the French hierarchy and authoritarian leadership, and that the subordinates therefore must argue for their opinion and try to claim their territory, even if the leader is solely taking all decisions. Castel et al (2007, p. 550) more specifically explain that the French subordinates generally adopt an ambivalent attitude towards authority and employers. Although they respect authority, they may also challenge it since their leaders often make decisions without consulting them. It seems as if the French subordinates also have a need to fight for themselves from the bottom-up and assert their existence and ideas against the authoritarian leadership. It also suggests that the French subordinates could be ready for more involvement in their work.

Distance to the subordinates

Fred discovered another aspect of the French hierarchy during his time as a leader in France. Because of the hierarchy in France it was not only difficult as a leader to receive feedback from the subordinates, but it was neither acceptable for Fred as a leader to sit in an open space office together with his subordinates. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, p. 59) have found that in high power distance cultures, such as France, there is an accepted hierarchy where all members have their given position. In other words, because of the accepted hierarchy in France, subordinates and leaders are not equal, and a Swedish leader, who is used to a more equal relationship to his or her subordinates, can therefore not expect to be considered as an equal in the workplace. There is a much more distinct distance between leader and subordinates in France.
Betty highlights another aspect of the French leader’s distance to the subordinates as she describes how surprised she was over how the French leaders kept their professional and personal life so separated. Betty explains that in Sweden it is common to talk about people’s personal life over coffee while in France it is possible to work side by side with somebody for many years without knowing anything about the person’s private life. Also the previous literature have established that Swedish leaders are in general very available to their subordinates and that they are often socializing with their subordinates (Mårtensson, 1998, p.343f), which is not very common among French leaders (Gesteland, 2005, p.252). Alan provides a further explanation to this phenomenon as he states that it is very important as a leader in France to keep a distance to the subordinates and through both body language and way of addressing the subordinates demonstrate the leadership. “One cannot create a general “buddy”-leadership style here or the subordinates will take advantage of that”. Similarly Erica explains that when working with a French team it is important as a leader to not become too much of a friend to the French subordinates or they will quickly take advantage of that. One might explain the distance that the French leaders keep to their subordinates as a necessity for an authoritarian leader. By getting closer to the subordinates the authoritarian leader will seem less authoritarian and possible lose some respect from the subordinates.

The expert leader

The previous description of the French leader as the sole decision maker reflects an additional aspect of the French leadership behavior, the notion of the French expert leader. Not only is it expected that the leaders make most of the decisions in an organization but it is also expected that the leaders have the competence to make all these decisions. Gesteland (2005, p.252) explains that since French leaders manage their subordinates in a very authoritarian style, and since they are often reluctant to delegate authority, the French leader is also expected to be highly competent and to know the answer to every question that comes up. David describes the French leader to be very detail oriented and as a consequence sometimes lacks the ability to see the bigger picture. These findings indicate that the French leader is much more of a specialist whereas the Swedish leader might be more of a generalist. When Gabriella arrived in France she found out that it was not really appropriate for her to ask for help even though she was new at the office. She explains, “you are not supposed to ask for help here. You should be able to handle your job and it is not perceived as strength here to ask for help as it can be in Sweden”. This is likely to become the consequence from the notion of the French expert leader who is expected to know everything. With great power to the leader also comes great responsibility and great expectations.

Untrustworthy subordinates

Both Christian and Erica describe how the French subordinates require more control and follow up than Swedish subordinates, in order to carry out their tasks. Erica experienced that the French subordinates had another sense of responsibility and sense of pride for delegated tasks than Swedish subordinates. Erica explains that she could not understand why the French subordinates would not do what she had told them to do and why they tried to escape their task as soon as she was not following up on their results. There is no mentioning or explanation of the evading French subordinates in the literature on cultural differences between Sweden and France, but it seems reasonable to assume that it is a consequence of the French authoritarian leadership. With an authoritarian leader subordinates are expected to perform their task under their leader’s supervision. However, when the leader is not around to follow up and control the subordinates, the productivity is likely to decrease. If the
subordinates are not trusted with own responsibility they are also less likely to feel needed and therefore loyal to the task. A more democratic leader, who to a larger extent delegates responsibility to the subordinates, could probably expect another loyalty towards the leader and the task from the subordinates.

In the following paragraphs’ I will present how the Swedish leader have adjusted their leadership behavior to the French context, the Swedish leader’s attitudes towards the adjustment of their leadership behavior, their perceived difficulties with the adjustment and possible advantages of being a Swedish leader in France. I will look at these different part of the adjustment process in order to gain a better overall understanding of how the Swedish leaders should adjust the leadership behavior to the French context, from an outward as well as inward perspective.

5.2.5 The Swedish leader’s adjustment to the French context

As previously mentioned, there are several cultural differences in leadership between Sweden and France that have affected the leadership behavior of the Swedish leaders in France. I will now present how the Swedish leaders have adjusted their leadership behavior to the French context.

a) From participative to autocratic and directive

Almost all of the Swedish leaders experience that they have adjusted from a more consensus-oriented leadership, and thus participative leadership style (DuBrin, 2010,p.114f), to make more individual decisions, which would characterize an autocratic leadership style (De Cremer, 2006,p.82). Not only has it been difficult for the Swedish leader to include the French subordinates in the decision-making process (David & Fred), but the subordinates have also expected that they as leaders individually make all decisions (Alan & Erica). Some of the leaders (Christian, Erica & Fred) further experienced that they had to adjust their leadership behavior to become much more directive in France.

The necessary adjustment of the Swedish leaders to become more autocratic in their leadership behavior and take more individual decision can be explained in the theory by Hofstede’s cultural dimension of power distance and uncertainty avoidance. The high power distance in France indicates that there is a big difference in distributed power between subordinates and leader and that consequently the subordinates are strongly dependent on their leader. (Hofstede & Hofstede,2005,p.72) The Swedish leaders wanted to believe in the capabilities of their French subordinates by giving them more individual responsibility, by involving them in the decision-making or by finding their own means to the end results of their tasks. However, the experiences of the Swedish leaders indicate that the French subordinates had grown dependent of a strong leader and that they may not have been ready to handle the increased responsibility of having a more independent role. Furthermore, France’s high ranking in the uncertainty avoidance index indicates that French people need formal rules and like clear instructions (Hofstede & Hofstede,2005,p.197ff). Since the French subordinates were used to a directive leader who would give precise instruction and continuously follow up on their results, it is understandable that it might have been difficult for them to naturally make decisions on their own or even that their productivity decreased once they were not checked up on.
Another cultural factor that has forced some of the Swedish leaders to become more autocratic as leaders is the negativity of the French subordinates. Alan, Betty, Christian and Erica have all explained how frustrating it can be to work with negative French subordinates. Both Christian and Erica have more specifically experienced that they at times have had to become more autocratic in order to put an end to the complaining from the French subordinates. It is possible that the negativity of the French subordinates is a consequence of French hierarchy and very authoritarian leadership. Castel et al (2007,p.550) explain that the French subordinates generally adopt an ambivalent attitude towards authority and employers. Although they respect authority, they may also challenge it since their leaders often make decisions without consulting them. It seems as if the French subordinates are expressing their discontent with their autocratic leaders and that they want to be listened to and allowed to come with ideas.

Interestingly, Betty has had a different way to handle her negative subordinates. Betty describes that the negativity of her subordinates are sometimes affecting her to become more negative as well. As a consequence she has adjusted her more autocratic leadership style that she has had to adapt in France to a coaching leadership behavior, which is closer to her traditional leadership behavior. When dealing with negative subordinates Betty is trying to explain what it is they are trying to accomplish and coaching them to change their focus and thus use the energy to find a solution instead.

b) From informal to formal

Alan, Betty, Erica and Fred all had to adjust to the French hierarchy and go from an informal leadership behavior to a more formal leadership behavior. For instance, Fred tried to oppose the French hierarchy and as a leader sit in the open space office together with his subordinates. However, he had to realize that it was impossible in France as a leader to share an open space office with the subordinates. France is a very hierarchical culture in which it is important to respect the organizational layers and chains of command (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005,p.59). This is very different from the more egalitarian Swedish culture. As Betty describes it; “in Sweden it would not be a problem for a factory worker to tell his opinion to the CEO if it was necessary”.

Given how important it seems to be to respect the hierarchy in France it can seem surprising that Fred and Gabriella both experienced a type of reverse power distance while taking part of discussions in France. They both experienced that they had to push for their own opinions and stand up for themselves in order to be heard in France. This indicates that it is necessary as a Swedish leader to be authoritarian and formal in order to keep the respect for the hierarchy. It is rather confusing how it on one hand it is important to subordinates to respect authority in France but on the other hand it is fine for them to challenge it. This might be explained by Castel et al (2007,p.549) who state that there has always been a contrast between authority and freedom in France. This contrast has throughout history played an important role in the French society ever since the submission to hierarchy and lack of autonomy came to clash with the values of freedom and fraternity, which were originally expressed as ideals during the French Revolution. I think that these tendencies can still be reflected in contemporary France were French habitants are defending their rights through strikes and demonstrations on a regular basis.

The reverse power distance indicates a revolution among the French subordinates. Even thought they still respect old traditions with an authoritarian leader and hierarchical roles, they
also seem to want to claim their existence and their ideas against this autocratic leadership. It seems as if the French subordinates are ready for more involvement in their work and therefore they are fighting for themselves from the bottom-up.

c) From considerate and personal to considerate and distant

As have previously been mentioned, leaders in France keep their personal and private life separate. Alan and Erica who both have worked in France for many years explain that it is not recommended as a leader in France to have a close relationship with the subordinates since the French subordinates will take advantage of this. Both Erica and Alan have personally experienced this phenomenon. While Swedish leaders are in general very available for their subordinates and they are often socializing with their subordinates (Mårtensson, 1998,p.343f), the literature explains that socialization with their subordinates is not very common among French leaders (Gesteland,2005,p.252). One might explain the distance that the French leaders keep to their subordinates as a necessity for an authoritarian leader. By getting closer to the subordinates the authoritarian leader will seem less authoritarian. However, Erica describes that her Swedish side of noticing the subordinate as an individual has been appreciated among her French subordinates and had led to more loyalty among her French subordinates. It thus seems like the Swedish leader in France must keep the distance to the subordinates from his or her own side and must stay a leader by not becoming too personal. Meanwhile, to care about the subordinates represents a typical behavior from the Swedish leader that could lead to a more advantageous relationship to the French subordinates.

In general, the Swedish leaders have had to learn the importance of respecting the hierarchy. In France it is not possible to fall back into a more Swedish, equal leadership style. French subordinates tend to rely on their leaders and they respect authority (Castel et al,2007,p.550) and in order to not lose control as a leader in France, it seems important to demand the same respect that you in turn would have to show a French leader. Erica and Alan’s experiences also indicate that the French subordinates were not ready to become more equal to the leader. To have an informal leader was a behavior that the French subordinates were not used to, which they might have experienced as very positive. It however seems as it was not possible for the French subordinates to be more equal to the leader while still respecting the leader and as a consequence they took advantage of the Swedish leader.

Roughly generalized it seems as if the Swedish leaders have gone from a more relationship-oriented leadership behavior, which can be characterized as encouraging and expressing confidence that a person can perform a difficult task, socializing with people to build relationships, recognizing accomplishments and offering support (Casimir & Keith Ng, 2010,p.502), to a more task-oriented leadership behavior, which is characterized as planning and organizing of activities, explaining and clarification of specific rules and expected results as well as directing activities and monitoring performances (Casimir & Keith Ng, 2010,p.502).

From another perspective it could also be argued, with less emphasis on the culture, that the Swedish leaders have adjusted their leadership behavior according to the individual needs of their subordinates. Some of the Swedish leaders in this study have mentioned that they have an individualized leadership style, which can be characterized as the leader forms unique relationships with each and every one of the subordinates (Wallis et al., 2011,p.185). In other words, it could therefore be argued that the Swedish leaders have adjusted their leadership behavior according to the specific needs of their subordinates, and not necessarily according
to the French culture, as they would have had to adjust their leadership behavior according to
the specific needs of their subordinates in Sweden as well.

5.2.6 The Swedish leader’s attitude towards adjustment

All the Swedish leaders experience that they have had to adjust their leadership behavior to
better suit the French context. All leaders are furthermore of the opinion that it is important to
try to understand the foreign culture and to adjust accordingly. These findings are coherent
with the contingency approach to leadership, which describes the most effective leaders to be
the leaders who are able to adjust their behaviors and styles appropriate for the situation
(DuBrin, 2010,p.133). It is clear that the leaders in this study consider adjustment of their
leadership behavior a necessity to be effective leaders in the French context.

Most of the Swedish leaders’ narratives however highlight somewhat of a restriction to their
rather accepting attitudes towards the adjustment of their leadership behavior. For example,
Alan explains that it is important to for a leader to try to understand the foreign culture and try
to adjust accordingly, however, without ever denying one’s own culture or values. Betty
similarly describes that she was prepared to adjust to certain routines and social codes in
France but that she was never prepared to change as a person. She clarifies that it is important
to be yourself as a leader and not try to copy a behavior that is not you since it is likely to
shine trough and not be trustworthy.

In line with the Swedish leaders’ attitude towards the adjustment of their leadership behavior,
the literature on authentic leadership emphasizes the importance of being your own person
and staying true to your own values as a leader. For instance, Avolio & Gardner (2005,p.320)
explain that in order for a leader to be authentic, the leader must develop his or her own
leadership style, which should be consistent with the individual’s personality and character.
The Swedish leaders in this study have been open to adjust their leadership behavior in certain
situations whereas in other situations they have not been prepared to adjust from their
personal leadership style. This could seem contradictory or confusing with regards to how to
know in which situations a leader is adjusting the leadership behavior without waiving the
personality. According to George (2003,p.14), it is necessary for an effective leader today to
be able to adjust the leadership style to occurring situations, which is not the same as being
unauthentic or playing roles. I think that it is reasonable to argue that all leader assignment,
to some extent, involves adjustments of the leadership behavior according to occurring
situations. However, just as the Swedish leaders attitudes towards the adjustment of their
leadership behavior reflect, it is not possible to adjust the own leadership style to just any
extent without waiving the own personality. In the same time one can argue that individuals
cannot always respect all their values, which is not necessarily the same as not being true to
the own values or the own person. Personal values are likely to sometimes be in conflict with
each other, and then the individual might have to choose to respect a value that feels more
important. I am sure that also authentic leaders must to some extent act according to a
behavior that might not be in line with the own values all the time.

Although the Swedish leaders in several situations in France have played down their typical
leadership style, it is clear that they have not adapted a completely French leadership
behavior. The experiences of the Swedish leaders indicate that they have also tried to keep
part of the Swedish leadership style in the French context. Even if a more Swedish leader
behavior is different from a French leader behavior it is important to highlight that the
Swedish leaders have experienced that they have been respected and appreciated for their
Swedish leadership among their French subordinates. Therefore it can clearly also be considered positive to hold on to one’s authentic leadership style as a leader.

David’s attitude towards the adjustment of the leadership behavior highlights another aspect with the adjustment. David believes that it is important to through awareness adjust the leadership behavior to the host culture, but he also believes that it is difficult to actually change from the own leadership style. One of the most well known scholars within the contingency theories, Fred E Fiedler, argues that a leadership style is a relatively permanent aspect of the leader’s behavior and that the style is therefore difficult to modify (Vroom & Jago, 2007,p.20). One can argue that Fiedler has a point when he states that the leader should be adjusted after the situation and not the other way around. People are different and not all leaders will be suitable in just any situation, especially not in an international environment. Not all individuals are able to adjust the own leadership behavior, which is deeply rooted in the own personality, and an international assignment is likely to lead to situations that require adjustments of the leadership behavior.

5.2.7 Difficulties with the adjustment

One issue with the expatriated leaders adjustment, which has been extensively highlighted in the expatriate literature, is that the leadership behavioral adjustment might challenge the own values and beliefs of the leader (Van Vianen et al, 2004,p.705f), which can lead to psychological distress (Sanchez et al,2000,p.96; Leong & Ward,2000,p.764). It is further argued that as a consequence many individuals might feel that they cannot adjust their behavior, since it leads to questioning the own identity (Javidan et al, 2006,p.85). Although the Swedish leaders do not particularly experience that they have had any personal difficulties with own values when adjusting their leadership to the French context, they have adjusted their leadership behavior in order to fit in with the French subordinates. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that they to some extent have had to compromise with their own values.

The attitude of the Swedish leaders indicates that their behavioral adjustment have sometimes been necessary for the greater good of the organization and it could be the reason to why they have been prepared to adjust their leadership behavior to a very different leadership style. In the same time there have also been situations in which the Swedish leaders have not been prepared to adjust their leadership behavior. It seems like there are some values that the Swedish leaders are not prepared to compromise with. Perhaps is this the reason why the Swedish leaders do not particularly experience that they have had any personal difficulties with own values when adjusting their leadership to the French context. In the same time it is not reasonable to believe that the adjustment process of the Swedish leaders has not been difficult. It is obvious that it would not be very encouraging as a leader to not be able to trust the subordinates, or to not be allowed to come to close to the subordinates out of fear of being taken advantage of. Few leaders are likely to feel comfortable if they had to become very directive or autocratic in their leadership behavior if it is not who they normally are as persons. The Swedish leaders do however not deny that it has sometimes been difficult to adjust the leadership behavior to the French context, but more in the sense that it has been discouraging and draining and not particularly in terms of questioned identity. The fact that all the Swedish leaders have so far stayed throughout the duration of their assignment indicate that the adjustment of their leadership behavior, from an inward perspective, cannot have been too difficult or else it is likely that they would have returned to the home company. The emotional well-being does not seem to have been a deal breaking aspect of the Swedish leaders, which could be affected by how these Swedish leaders are as persons.
The fact that all the participating leaders have stayed for the entire international assignment is not necessarily only a sign that they did not experience any direct personal difficulties with the adjustment, but also that they are individuals capable of handling the difficulties that could have occurred. According to Gangestad & Snyder (2000, p.530f), it is easier for some individuals than others to adjust their behavior to better suit a different cultural work setting. One can assume that the Swedish leaders in this study are individuals who are not afraid of a challenge or usually have problems with adjusting their leadership behavior to different situations that occur, also in the home culture. It must be remembered that the participating leaders have all chosen to go abroad for the international assignment, and I believe that individuals who volunteer to go abroad on an international assignment can be characterized as open-minded and curious. Assuredly it would be difficult to find respondents who have been forced to expatriation but the adjustment process is likely to have looked different, in a more psychologically challenging sense, from the point of view of a leader who perhaps felt obliged accept an international assignment or of an expatriated leader who have returned home prematurely.

Another reason to why the Swedish leaders in this study have not experienced the adjustment of their leadership behavior as too psychologically challenging could be due to the French culture. Previous research suggest that the degree of discrepancy between the home culture norms and the host culture norms, impact the difficulty that the individual may experience when adjusting the own behavior to the host culture (Molinsky, 2007, p.627). As have been presented earlier in this study, French and Swedish cultures are very different when it comes to some aspects, which are likely to affect the leadership behavior of expatriate leaders between the two countries. One could however argue that although France and Sweden are different in terms of organizational and leadership culture, they are in the same time similar as far as general living conditions are concerned. It is possible that the psychological adjustment could have been more difficult for the Swedish leaders if they would have expatriated to a more culturally different host country, where it would have been more difficult to generally fit in.

5.2.8 Positive aspects of being a Swedish leader in France

Two of the leaders, Betty and David both describe how they have experienced a different tolerance for their leadership behavior from their French subordinates since they are not French. It is not likely to be as easy for a French leader to introduce a more democratic leadership since there might not be the same faith in such a leadership among French employees. The subordinates are likely to expect a certain behavior from a French leader whereas with a Swedish leader it is more difficult for the subordinates to know what to expect. In other words, French subordinates who get a new French leader will have a rather clear picture about how the leadership will be, even if it of course also depends much on the individual leader. The French subordinates who get a new Swedish leader do less clearly know what to expect. Therefore it might be easier to accept a different leadership behavior from a Swedish leader. Some of the Swedish leaders have also experienced that it is accepted that they do not adopt a completely French leadership behavior since it is not expected of them.

Overall the Swedish leaders experience that there are many positive aspect of being a Swedish leader in France. Many of the leaders have deliberately tried to keep part of their Swedish leadership since they have experienced positive reactions from their French subordinates on
their Swedish leadership and their increased participation. Alan and Erica specifically mention that French subordinates tend to be disappointed when the Swedish leader leaves and the subordinates go back to having a traditional French leader. The tolerance that the Swedish leaders have experienced for their leadership behavior indicates that the French subordinates already have the expectations on the Swedish leader to behave differently. Even if the French subordinates might be hesitant and observing of the Swedish leadership behavior at first, the Swedish leaders’ experiences indicate that they might with time discover that the Swedish leadership can be rather exciting and positive. From that it is possible to conclude that also the subordinates in France want more participation at work.

5.3 Alternative patterns of the adjustment processes

In this third and final part of the analysis I will look at less prominent patterns across the Swedish leaders’ experiences, but which will still be important for the over all picture of the adjustment process.

Erica and Allan’s narratives of their adjustment indicate that the two of them have experienced somewhat similar adjustment processes to each other, but different from the rest of the respondent leaders. Erica and Alan have experienced the most significant difficulties with cultural differences that have affected their leadership behavior. This can be due to several reasons. First of all, neither Alan nor Erica particularly prepared for the cultural differences between Sweden and France that could have had consequences for their adjustment process. Several of the other participating leaders did not either particularly prepare for the expatriation but in addition, Erica and Alan’s expatriation was self-initiated and therefore they did not have a home organization as support during the international assignment. Even if the home organization does not provide the expatriate with cultural training before departure, it is still reasonable to assume that a home organization would offer the expatriated leader some sense of safety and support. On the other hand it is possible to argue that self-initiated leaders might have been extra motivated and had an overall positive attitude to the expatriation since they personally initiated the decision to go abroad.

Another reason to why Alan and Erica’s adjustment processes are different to the other participating leaders is the duration of their expatriation. Both Erica and Alan have chosen to stay in France after their initial assignment. Their extensive experience from being a leader in France is likely to be a reason to why they have experienced more difficulties in adjusting their leadership behavior; they have had more time to experience challenging situations. Alan and Erica’s experiences indicate that their respective adjustment process has been quite difficult initially, but their extensive experience from being a Swedish leader in France has also facilitated challenging situations with time. They have learnt to handle challenging situations, which could have put their values to the test, even if they have not necessarily changed their values.

The experiences of Christian and David indicate that the adjustment of the leadership behavior might not be necessary to the same extent within a Swedish company in France. Although more of the expatriate leaders have worked for a Swedish company in France, Christian and David have explicitly mentioned this as a facilitator to their adjustment process. It seems reasonable to assume that it would be easier for a Swedish leader to maintain a Swedish leadership behavior in a Swedish company in France. In a Swedish company in France it is more likely that the French subordinates would have a reason to accept and in their turn adjust to a Swedish leadership behavior. Consequently Swedish leaders in a
Swedish company in France would have an advantage since the organizational culture of the company itself is likely to reflect the Swedish culture.

The adjustment process of Gabriella is a bit different from the other leaders, which draws attention to another aspect of the adjustment process. Although being very important for her project, Gabriella did not only relocate to France in the role of an expatriate leader but also in the role of an expatriate partner. Because her partner had a higher position within the company, Gabriella did not experience the same first hand support for her work. She describes that she wanted her work to be considered just as important as her husband, no matter what position he is in. Gabriella’s experience indicates that the adjustment process of an expatriate leader can be more difficult without an own platform of support, especially in a culture where hierarchy is important.

The experience of Fred indicates that learning the language is an important aspect of the adjustment process. Fred is the only leader who explicitly states that it has been difficult as a Swedish leader to not be able to speak directly to all subordinates. However, the narratives of all Swedish leaders still elucidate the importance of learning the language since they have all mentioned learning French as the primary recommendation to future Swedish leaders who will relocate to France.
6. Conclusion

In this final chapter, I will look back at the purpose of this study in order to reflect over the results that I have found.

The main purpose of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of the subjective adjustment process of the expatriated leader, and to describe how the expatriate leader adjusts the leadership behavior to the host culture from an outward, as well as an inward perspective.

6.1 How the Swedish leader adjusts the leadership behavior to the French context, from an outward perspective

With this study I wanted on one hand practically contribute to the, in my opinion, very limited research on how Swedish leaders who relocate to France adjust their leadership behavior according to the specific cultural differences that exists between Sweden and France, in order to fit in. There are many Swedish leaders who relocate to France every year and I hope that this study will allow me to help Swedish leaders, who are considering relocating to France, obtain a more realistic idea of what to expect and benefit from the experience of those leaders who have gone before them.

Having done my research, the experiences of the Swedish leaders in this study have illustrated that they have adjusted their leadership behavior to the French context in the following manner:

1. From participative to autocratic and directive

The Swedish leaders who are used to execute a more consensus-oriented behavior have in France adjusted their leadership behavior to become more autocratic. The notion of the expert leader in combination with the expectations on the leader’s individual decision-making in France, have led all the Swedish leaders to individually make decisions even though they normally consult their subordinates before making a decision. The Swedish leaders have also gone from their traditionally participative behavior to a more directive, less delegating and more controlling behavior. The experiences of the Swedish leaders indicate that in order to carry out their tasks, the untrustworthy subordinates in France need a leader who is providing them with more precise instructions and who more strictly follows up the results. If not checked up on by a directive leader, the French subordinates have a tendency not to carry out their tasks. The negativity of the French subordinates is another reason to why some of the Swedish leaders have had to adopt a more autocratic leadership; they have had to be very autocratic in order to put an end to the complaining.

2. From informal to formal

The Swedish leaders who are used to a more informal leadership have in France adjusted their leadership behavior to behave more formal. The leaders have had to become more formal in order to respect the hierarchy in France and keep a distance to the subordinates. This made it complicated for the consensus-oriented Swedish leader to receive feedback from the French subordinates since they are not used to challenge the authority. This also made it complicated for the traditional egalitarian Swedish leader to behave according to the notion that all are in
the same boat, since the strict hierarchy and organizational layers in France forces the leader to behave like an authoritarian leader.

3. From considerate and personal to considerate and distant

The Swedish leaders who are used to a more personal leadership have in France adjusted their leadership behavior in order to keep the distance to the subordinates. In France it is not common that the leader socializes with the subordinates, but rather keeps the professional and personal life separated. The experiences from some of the leaders indicate that a leader in France cannot become too much of a friend to the French subordinate or the French subordinate will take advantage of the leader and lose respect for the leader. Therefore it is important that the Swedish leader in France demand the same respect from the subordinates, as they would have shown a French leader.

Having done my research I can strongly support the notion that in order to adjust to a new culture, the learning of culturally appropriate behavior and when to execute them plays an important role (Black & Mendenhall, 1990, p. 124). The experiences of all Swedish leaders in this research indicate the necessity to adjust their leadership behavior to better suit the host culture. However, the experiences of the Swedish leaders also indicate that it is not always necessary to adjust the leadership behavior but that it instead also can be positive to keep the own leadership behavior, which have been appreciated among the French subordinates.

Having done my research I further realize that learning an appropriate behavior for the host culture is actually not only about fitting in, but also about when it is ok not to. Although it is important as a foreign leader to understand which situations that are critical in terms of in-country effectiveness, there might also be other situations in which it is less critical to obey to host cultural norms. This is the type of knowledge that would really be helpful for a Swedish, or any leader who is about to relocate to a foreign culture. Unfortunately there is no guaranteed way to know exactly what to do or how to behave in a given situation in the foreign culture. There are however some principles of what is more likely to happen in a given situation in the foreign country.

It was my wish before this research that my findings would allow me to help other Swedish leaders, who are considering relocating to France, to obtain a more realistic idea of what to expect and benefit from the experience of those leaders who have gone before them. I have now shared my main specific findings on how Swedish leaders might have to adjust their leadership behavior to the French context. These findings could offer an initial frame of reference from which future Swedish leader can start to make sense of the accepted norms and behaviors in France. It must however be remembered that these findings represent stereotypical behavior and cultural differences. All individuals are different in all cultures and there are no individuals that will behave perfectly according to the frame of reference suggested in this study.

6.2 How the Swedish leader adjusts the leadership behavior to the French context, from an inward perspective

With this study I will also more generally contribute to the limited theory on expatriated leaders’ subjective, inward adjustment, which deals with underlying issues with the
adjustment process. Given that behavioral adjustment can be psychologically challenging for
the individual leader, I would like to further elucidate the desirability and possibility to adjust
one’s leadership behavior. I will also look at possible difficulties and the negative
consequences behavioral adjustment can have on the individual leader’s well-being. Finally I
will look at variables that can facilitate or impede the adjustment of the leadership behavior
that the expatriate leader goes through in the host culture.

a) Possibility and desirability to adjust

Having done my study I have come to the conclusion that the expatriate leader should, to
some extent, adjust the own leadership behavior to better suit the host culture. Being a leader
in any foreign culture is likely to involve necessary adjustments of the own leadership
behavior to better suit the host country context. The narratives of the Swedish leaders in this
study indicate that it is not possible for an expatriate leader to behave in the host country
based on how he or she behaves in the home country. Even if the most convenient, and least
psychologically threatening option for an expatriate leader would be to not adjust the own
leadership behavior to the foreign culture at all, this adjustment is experienced as necessary
in order to be an effective leader in the host culture, as argued by the contingency theory to
leadership (Amagoh, 2009, p.995).

Although the Swedish leaders have adjusted their leadership behavior to the French context in
certain situations, they have specifically pointed out how they were not prepared to adjust
their leadership behavior to just any extent in France. The Swedish leaders narratives indicate
that first of all, it would not be possible to adjust the own leadership behavior to any extent,
since it would be difficult to adjust from the leadership behavior that one has learnt over a
long time from the home culture. That it would be difficult to change appropriate behaviors
inherited from the home culture is supported by Fiedler who argues that a leadership style
reflects the leader’s personality and is a relatively permanent aspect of the leader’s behavior,
which is why it is difficult to modify (Vroom & Jago, 2007, p.20). Before conducting my
study I though that Fiedler’s theory, which also advocate the adjustment of situations
according to the leadership style instead of the other way around, sounded complicated and
very inconvenient to carry out in practice. Having conducted my study, I realize that all
people are different and it becomes clear to me that not all leaders will be suitable for all
situations, and perhaps especially not in an international environment. Not all individuals are
able to adjust the own leadership behavior, which is rooted in the own personality. An
international assignment is likely to lead to situations that require adjustments of the own
leadership behavior. As a consequence, for some people it would not be possible to go abroad
on an international assignment, they would not be able to handle it.

The Swedish leaders narratives further indicate that second of all, it would not be desirable to
adjust the own leadership behavior to any extent. If a leader adjusts the own leadership
behavior to the extent of becoming something that he or she is not, then the leadership would
not be trustworthy. This finding is in line with the concept of authentic leadership, which
explains that in order to be authentic, the leader must stay true to the own person and the own
values (Michie & Gooty, 2005, p.448; Harter, 2002, p.382). With the support of my study I
think that it is reasonable to argue that all leadership assignments, at least to some extent,
involves adjustment of the leadership behavior according to occurring situations. As far as I
am concerned, I think that it is impossible as a leader to always stay true to the own values, at
least with the greater good of the organization in mind. Personal values are likely to be in
conflict with each other at some point and then the individual might have to choose to respect
a value that feels more important. Although I do agree with the respondent and the authentic leadership theory that it is important as a leader to not compromise with the own values and who the leader is as a person, I also think that it should not be exaggerated either. In my opinion it would be impossible for a leader to always respect all of the own values, which is not necessarily the same as not being true to the own values or the own person.

b) Difficulties with the adjustment

Having done my research I have not found support for the psychological distress and questioned identity that expatriates have been found to experience (Sanchez et al, 2000,p.96; Javidan et al, 2006,p.85) when adjusting their behavior to better suit another culture. The expatriate leaders have, from an inward perspective, found the adjustment of their leadership behavior discouraging and draining at times, however, none of the respondent leaders have expressed that they have experienced personal difficulties in terms of questioned identity, when adjusting their leadership behavior to the French culture. This does not mean that this theory is wrong and that this is not the case in other studies, however, my study does not support this issue. This could be due to the following reasons:

The fact that all the participating leaders have stayed for the entire international assignment is not necessarily only a sign that they did not experience any direct psychological difficulties with the adjustment, but also that they are individuals capable of handling the difficulties that could have occurred. According to Gangestad & Snyder (2000,p.530f), it is easier for some individuals than others to adjust their behavior to better suit a different cultural work setting. I think that the fact that the Swedish leaders all volunteered to go abroad on an international assignment indicates that they are open-minded and curious, which I believe are characteristics of individuals who could have an easier task in adjusting their leadership behavior to a foreign culture. Another reason to why the Swedish leaders in this study have not experienced the adjustment of their leadership behavior as too psychologically challenging could be due to the French culture. Previous research suggest that the degree of discrepancy between the home culture norms and the host culture norms, impact the difficulty that the individual may experience when adjusting the own behavior to the host culture (Molinsky,2007,p.627). Although France and Sweden are different in terms of organizational and leadership culture, they are in the same time similar as far as general living conditions are concerned. It is possible that the psychological adjustment could have been more difficult for the Swedish leaders if they would have expatriated to a more culturally different host country, where it would have been more difficult to generally fit in.

c) Other variables that facilitate or impede the adjustment process

In addition to the personality and cultural variable, there are other variables that could facilitate or impede the Swedish leaders’ adjustment process. My study indicates that variables such as a self-initiated expatriation could impede the adjustment process due to the lack of support from a home company. In the same time it could be argued that the obvious willingness to go on an international assignment could instead facilitate the adjustment process. It has further been identified that the role of an expatriated leader in combination with the role of an expatriating partner could have impeding consequences on the adjustment process due to the lack of an own platform of support. On the other hand, duration of the expatriation has been suggested to facilitate the adjustment process since it becomes easier to handle challenging situations in the host country over time and with more experience. Another variable that is likely to have a positive effect on the adjustment process is the
nationality of the host company. The Swedish leaders’ experiences indicate that the adjustment process of an expatriate Swedish leader would be easier in a Swedish company in France as the organizational culture is likely to also reflect the Swedish culture. Last but not least, learning the language has been identified as an action that could facilitate the adjustment process of expatriate leaders.

The Swedish leaders of this study have come up with a few tips for future Swedish leaders who will expatriate to France. Their main advices to facilitating the adjustment process in France are:

- Many of the leaders specifically mention cultural learning as an advice for other Swedish leaders who are about to relocate to France.
- Almost all leaders also mention learning the language as an advice for future Swedish expatriates since it will allow the leader to become closer to the subordinates and take part of the host culture on another level.
- Finally some of the leaders also point out the advantages of an ally in the host country, who could work as a cultural interpreter and support.

As mentioned in the introduction of this research, scholars have given much attention to research about predictors of expatriates adjustments and early departure, given the significant costs that expatriations constitute for companies. Much less attention has been given to the subjective experience of the individual and to actually understand the psychological aspect of the adjustment process that the expatriates go through during the transfer. Nevertheless, this less tangible aspect of the expatriate leader’s adjustment should be especially interesting to prospecting expatriates who have never lived abroad. Better knowledge of what expatriates go through during the adjustment should be interesting also for scholars and organizations, since a better understanding of the adjustment process is likely to enable more suitable preparation and necessary support to the expatriate leader. In order for an organization to benefit from a global economy, organizations today must be able to function well across cultural borders. Therefore it must be emphasized that the organizations themselves are not the units that are participating in the different cultural settings or for that matter, interacting with the host country nationals. In order for the organization to be successful, it is the expatriated individuals who work on behalf of the organization that must be able to properly adjust to the host cultural settings. A first step to better adjustment is to recognize the adjustment process of the individual leader’s leadership behavior, from both an outward and inward perspective. By learning more about what expatriate leaders go through during the adjustment process, organizations would be enabled to offer more suitable preparation and necessary support.
6.3 Limitations

When it comes to the practical contributions of this thesis, my wish was to help Swedish leaders, who are considering relocating to France, obtain a more realistic idea of what to expect and therefore benefit from the experience of those leaders who have gone before them. I think that I, from this study, am able to present a point of reference for aspiring expatriates in starting to understand French leadership behavior, and how it might be necessary to adjust the own leadership behavior to the French context. It must however be remembered that my sample for this study consisted of 7 leaders, which makes the generalizations that I can make from this study very limited. On the other hand the generalizations that I could have made from a sample consisting of 70, 700 or 7000 leaders would similarly be very limited. Since the findings in this study consist of subjective experiences I must emphasize the stereotypical nature of these findings. It must not be forgotten that all people are different, and there are no subordinates or leaders, in Sweden or France, that will perfectly correspond with the findings in this study. With that said I believe that this study can still contribute with an initial frame of reference and provide an insight to important differences between these two cultures in order to better prepare for the expatriation.

Limitations of the more general, theoretical contribution of this study include the sample and environment or investigation. The fact that all the participating leaders have stayed for the entire international assignment is not necessarily only a sign that they did not experience any direct difficulties with the adjustment, from an inward perspective, but also that they are individuals who are capable of handling the difficulties that could have occurred. In addition, my sample consisted of Swedish leaders who had all volunteered to go abroad on an international assignment. Assuredly it would be difficult to find respondents who have been forced to expatriation but the adjustment process is likely to have looked different, in a more psychologically challenging sense, from the point of view of a leader who perhaps felt obliged accept an international assignment or of an expatriated leader who have returned home prematurely.

Although all interested in relocating abroad, my sample of 7 leaders consists of leaders with rather different backgrounds, from different organizations and industries. These differences further complicate or limit the conclusions made from this study. Not only are the leaders different on an individual level but they are also working in different organizations with different organizational cultures, which in turn are likely to affect the adjustment process that the expatriate leaders experience. In the same time it could also be argued that the differences in the participating leaders and their organizations in this study is also an advantage, since it could provide the possibility that a larger spectrum of people can identify with some extent of their adjustment process.

As have been presented earlier in this study, French and Swedish cultures are very different when it comes to some aspects, which are likely to affect the leadership behavior of expatriate leaders between the two countries. One could however argue that although France and Sweden are different in terms of organizational and leadership culture, they are in the same time similar as far as general living conditions are concerned. It is possible that the adjustment of the leadership behavior, from an inward perspective, could have been more difficult for the Swedish leaders if they would have expatriated to a more culturally different host country, where it would have been more difficult to generally fit in.
6.4 Future research

The results from my conducted study raise questions for future research. I think that the topic of adjustment of the leadership behavior to another culture is both up to date and under researched. Depending on the characteristics of the expatriate leaders the researcher is able to draw different conclusions. What is important to one group of respondents is not necessarily important to another group. My sample consisted of leaders who had all willingly expatriated to France for an international assignment. I think it would have been interesting to further explore this topic of research but with a more diverse and more representative sample, based on different variables, such as for example, the degree of enthusiasm from the expatriated leaders to go on an international assignment. This would though require another approach and another method.
7. References


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Learning & Education, 3(1), 100–115.


8. Appendix

Interview guide

Background

1. Tell me about yourself (age, family situation etc)
2. Can you tell me briefly about your background as a leader in Sweden? (posts, number of years, industry, etc)
3. Can you tell me briefly about your assignment/assignments in France?
4. How come you ended up in France (applied for the position, was offered the position through my home company)?
5. Is there a particular reason to why it was France?

About preparing to work in another culture

6. How did you feel about working in a new and different culture?
7. How did you prepare for the relocation and the assignment? (practical, (language, housing etc) and emotionally)
8. How did your company help you in your preparation?
9. What could have been done differently when it comes to preparation, by either yourself or your company??

Cultural differences leadership

10. What expectations did you have before departure on possible cultural differences, regarding leadership, between Sweden and France?
11. How did you prepare according to those expectations?
12. How would you today describe the similarities and differences in leadership between Sweden and France?

Adjusted leadership

13. How would you describe your leadership style?
14. Describe how you have had to adjust your leadership style in France compared to your leadership style in Sweden?
15. Give examples of such situations!
16. What differences in expectations did you experience between your French subordinates compared to your Swedish subordinates?
17. What personal difficulties did you encounter when adjusting your leadership style to the French context? (for instance, when it comes to own values or emotions)
18. What advantages/ disadvantages do you experience in being a leader and Swedish in France?

Last but not least

19. Do you have any advice to give to other Swedish leaders who are moving to France?
20. Is there anything else that you would like to add?
Intervju guide

Bakgrund

1. Berätta kort om dig (Ålder, familjesituation etc)
2. Kan du berätta kortfattat om din bakgrund som ledare i Sverige? (positioner, antal år, bransch etc)
3. Kan du berätta kortfattat om ditt/dina uppdrag i Frankrike?
4. Hur kommer det sig att du är i Frankrike (sökte själv, blev erbjuden av det företag jag arbetade i)?
5. Fanns det någon särskild anledning till varför det blev just Frankrike?

Allmänt om att förbereda sig inför ett arbete i en annan kultur

6. Hur kände du inför att jobba i en ny och annorlunda kultur?
7. Hur förberedde du dig inför flytten och uppgiften (praktiskt (språk, bostad m m) och känslomässigt)
8. Hur hjälpte ditt företag dig i förberedelserna?
9. Vad hade kunnats göra annorlunda när det kommer till förberedelser av antingen dig själv eller från företagets sida?

Kulturskillnader ledarskap

10. Vilka föreställningar hade du innan du åkte på ev kulturskillnader, när det gäller ledarskap, mellan Sverige och Frankrike?
11. Hur förberedde du dig utifrån de föreställningarna?
12. Hur skulle du idag beskriva likheter och skillnader i ledarskap mellan Sverige och Frankrike?

Anpassat ledarskap

13. Hur skulle du beskriva ditt sätt att leda?
14. Beskriv på vilket sätt du har behövt anpassa din ledarstil i Frankrike jämfört med din ledarstil i Sverige?
15. Ge exempel på sådana situationer!
16. Vilka skillnader i förväntningar upplever du att du mött från dina franska underordnade jämfört med dina svenska underordnade?
17. Vilka personliga svårigheter har du stött på när du har behövt anpassa ditt ledarskap till den franska kulturen? (t e x när det gäller egna värderingar, känslor,)
18. Vilka fördelar/nackdelar upplever du med att vara en svensk och ledare i Frankrike?

Avslut

19. Har du några råd att ge till andra svenska ledare som ska flytta till Frankrike?
20. Finns det något annat som du känner att du vill tillägga?